

Abstract

The real price for accepting that there is only way of doing hermeneutics, and ultimately, theology has been the sacrifice of some of the significant models in the scriptures that God has given us for hermeneutical and theological enterprises. One of the models that we should not have been blind to is the model of Symbols for theology. A symbol may be an art piece, a ritual, a dance form, a saying, silence, countenance, a story, a song, or other realities like that, which serve as a metaphor, and which is pregnant with a story (or sacred story, which I call myth in this dissertation) that points to a religious, social or economic understanding of a people. In this work, I present the Adinkra Symbols of the Akan as such symbols, and as a route to showing the theology of the Akan people of Ghana. My aim is to encourage Symbolic Theology (as a branch of ethnotheology) through ethnohermeneutics, for people of the Majority World like Africa. In Africa where symbolisms occupy a great space in epistemology and religion, Symbolic Theology may be very appropriate. The extent, to which Scripture uses symbols for doing theology in both the Old and New Testaments, is not only far reaching, but is also surely meant for our emulation. However, we have not been exploring this symbolic way of doing theology in the deeper and extensive ways that we should have been doing. I am submitting that some of the effective ways of doing theology is to use symbols. At least two reasons account for this affirmation. First, human beings appreciate religious knowledge better when it is experienced, and they are able to retain and make the experience part of their lives through symbolic representations of those experiences.¹ Symbols then become the building blocks for maintaining the understanding of life in general, and religious experiences especially, for a people and their succeeding generations. Second, and constituting the reason for the first one is that, symbols are bi-

¹ H. W. Turner, "A Model for the Structure of Religion in Relation to the Secular," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 27 (1979): 42–64.

directional. They look back to draw from the experiences of the past, and re-activate the reality of those experiences, especially if they are built into rituals, for succeeding generations of that community. Symbols, in telling the metaphors of the religious experiences, then, also look forward into the future to facilitate both the evocation and introduction to the faith and theology of the original person(s) who made the symbolic representations of the religious experiences. It is my proposal that some the Adinkra Symbols of the Akans were created from religious experiences for the same purposes.

**The Creedal Symbols of my Great Grandparents: The Adinkra Symbols Reveal the
Theology of the Akan People of Ghana**

Written by
Kofi Amoateng

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Intercultural Studies

**The Creedal Symbols of my Great Grandparents: The Adinkra Symbols Reveal the
Theology of the Akans People of Ghana**

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Evangelism at Asbury Theological Seminary

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Glossary

AMCQ	Association of the Methodist Chiefs and Queenmothers in the Kumasi Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana.
Asamando	The dwelling of the dead. From this dwelling people may come back into the world to be born into their families again.
“Badeɛ” tree	<i>bridelia Micrant</i> of the natural order <i>Enphorbiaceae</i> ²
Ewiasɛ	Literally, under this firmament above. This is the dwelling place of the living as different from the dwelling of the spiritual beings.
Okra	The spirit of a person in Akan cosmology.
Queenmother	Among Akans the concept of the queen is not just a monarch who is a female. She is always the female partner of the king or chief. In fact, she is the one who exclusively has the right to present a candidate for acceptance as the king or chief. In most of the cases, she is the biological mother or the mother’s sister or mother’s mother of the king. Traditionally she is the mother of all the people of the community. Akans call her “Ohemaa” (literally = female chief or king). Akans have adopted the referent “queenmother ” for describing her office and role in Akan kingdoms or chiefdoms.

² W. Bruce. Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary: A Visual Primer on the Language of Adinkra* (Washington, D.C.: Pyramid Complex, 1998), 31.

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Very Rev. Kofi Amoateng
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DEDICATION

To my wife Ewura-Ama, I have troubled you with ideas for my writing for almost 6 years. Thank you for all the sacrifices. To the Most Rev. Prof. Emmanuel Asante and the Very Rev. Kofi Amponsah, the Lord used you to start it all. To my daughter Rhoda Afua Achiaa Amoateng (my paternal grandmother) and sons Ebenezer, Benjamin and Kofi Jnr., for enduring my absence physically and emotionally. To Rt. Rev. Dr. Nuh Ben Abubekr and my sister, Akosua Gyamfuaa-Fofie for all the prayer support. To Oswald and Emma Amo-Gottfried for all the kind support. The unfailing faith in all the support you all contributed to me cannot be put in the limited language I have, maybe, you deserve a symbol ... so, I dedicate this work.

General Introduction

When the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Kumasi³ was being elevated to a Basilica, part of the preparation was to refurbish the building to befit that new status. The building committee chose to use glazed glasses for the window, and “the young people of the Cathedral were up in arms against the committee for that decision.”⁴ The Archbishop Emeritus Peter Akwasi Sarpong,⁵ then the Archbishop of the Kumasi Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church, therefore, went to the art department of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (one of the premier universities in Ghana) and requested them to produce glasses with Adinkra Symbols embossed in them for the windows of the Basilica.



Figure 1

Adinkra Symbols in the windows of St. Peters Basilica,
Kumasi, Ghana.

When the building committee fixed the glasses with the Adinkra Symbols in the windows of the Basilica, the young people accepted them without anybody calling them to a

³ Kumasi is the capital city of the Asante Region of Ghana. That city is the second largest city in Ghana. That city is also, traditionally, the capital of the ancient Asante Kingdom, which constitutes the biggest Akan community in Ghana.

⁴ Peter K. Sarpong, Interview on the Religious and Social Significance of the Adinkra Symbols, Person to person, January 7, 2015.

⁵ Archbishop Emeritus Sarpong holds a PhD in Social Anthropology from Oxford University. He is a prolific author (26 books and 1,500 articles in journals) in the area of cultural and social anthropology about the Akan people of Ghana.

meeting to convince them.⁶ This story illustrates not how widespread the Adinkra Symbols are in Ghana, but it also points to how quickly the Symbols find acceptance in Ghana.

Symbol in this Dissertation

I have largely used the understanding of a symbol to the inclusive definition of the concept in which Gene Combs and Jill Freedman use it. According to Combs and Freedman, a symbol is an issue, in which people embed a metaphorical story or a religious myth for their particular cosmology and culture. I use the concept “myth” in this dissertation not with the intention of conveying the idea that something is not real or true as sometimes people take the concept “myth” to mean.⁷ I use the concept to represent a phenomenon that represents reality for a people. From this understanding therefore, we can translate the Adinkra Symbols as *Adinkra Ahyensodee*. *Ahyensodee* is a phenomenon that brings to memory a historical reality or experience, which a culture-specific people have sacred stories or myths to explain. Therefore, I use the concept “Symbol” to represent realities with origins that ethnic people have shrouded in thick descriptions or stories, or myths or rituals, or ceremonies. As Daniel Shaw articulates:

For majority of the world’s people, just as for the people of biblical times, mythology acts as a root metaphor for reality. While not always based on fact as seen from a rationalist viewpoint, myth is truth from the perspective of people for whom it establishes identity—it is their scripture.”⁸

⁶ Archbishop Peter Sarpong gave this information in a conversation with me on January 12, 2015, at 10.00 am -12.30 pm.

⁷ Daniel A. Shaw, “Myth, Mythology” in A. Scott ed. Moreau, Harold Assoc. ed. Netland, and Charles Assoc. ed Van Engen, *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books and Paternoster Press, 2000), 668.

⁸ Shaw, “Myth, Mythology” in Moreau, Netland, and Van Engen, 668.

Ethnic people like the Akans sometimes, use such myths (stories) to conceal some of their origins and identities.⁹ The Akans will refer to stories of such mythical expressions and values as *Anyankomsem* (literally, stories in the language of the gods, or stories of the gods, which require revelation or tutoring to get to their meanings).¹⁰

The Akan people of Ghana have many of such stories, which later have become commonly known as *Anansesem* (literally, stories of the Spider).¹¹ It may be interesting to note that just as Americans have the owl as symbolic of wisdom, Akans have the spider as symbolic of wisdom. Therefore, they refer to such mythological narratives that require wisdom to unravel as *Anansesem*.

I conclude that Comb and Freedman's definition of "symbol" is inclusive because they include the Geertzian¹² proposition that symbols provide meaning for a people from one generation of the people to another—thus seeing symbols as "analytic windows to 'culture'—the integrated ethos and worldview of a society."¹³ Again, Comb and Freedman's definition of symbol, makes room for the Turnerians¹⁴ who explain that symbols "might be called *operators* in the social process, things that, when put together in certain arrangements in certain contexts (especially rituals), produce social transformations,"¹⁵

⁹ Moreau, Netland, and Van Engen, 668.

¹⁰ Daniel Oduro-Mensah, *Akanism and Hebrewism: Akan-Mesopotamian Links and Earlier Civilization* (Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 2007), 2.

¹¹ Oduro-Mensah.

¹² The school of Clifford Geertz, the American symbolic anthropologist.

¹³ Sherry B. Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties," in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, JSTOR, Vol. 26, No. 1. (Jan., 1984), 126-166, 131.

¹⁴ The school of Turner, the the British symbolic anthropologist

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

For instance, for Combs and Freedman, even rituals in ceremonies—the Turnerian proposition, are symbols just like art pieces—like the Adinkra Symbols, songs, and stories, among others, because they (the rituals) carry metaphors, which, when interpreted lead to the discovery of intended realities for a people. Combs and Freedman explain: “By ‘ceremony’ we mean a set of actions, often called a ritual, that has symbolic [i.e., metaphorical] importance for the people performing it.”¹⁶

I have two reasons for settling on using Com and Freedman’s definition. First, and more importantly, the definition of Comb and Freedman combines two great persuasions of symbolic anthropological schools that are relevant to this work—Geertzian and Turnerian schools. In her “Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties,” Sherry B. Ortner explains:

Turner and the Chicago symbolic anthropologists did not so much conflict with one another as simply, for the most part, talk past one another. Yet the Turnerians added an important, and characteristically British, dimension to the field of symbolic anthropology as a whole, a sense of the *pragmatics* of symbols. They investigated much more detail than Geertz, Schneider, et al., the “effectiveness of symbols,” the question of how symbols actually what do all symbolic anthropologists claim they do: operate as active forces in the social process.”¹⁷

From the above explanation of Ortner, I identify some important upshots. First, it means that there are common grounds, which both the Geertzian and the Turnerians schools of symbolic anthropology share. Second, the explanation also articulates that apart from the commonly shared properties, the two schools compliment and provide a

¹⁶ Gene Combs and Jill Freedman, *Symbol Story and Ceremony: Using Metaphor in Individual and Family Therapy* (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), xvi.

¹⁷ Sherry B. Ortner, “Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties,” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, JSTOR, Vol. 26, No. 1. (Jan. 1984), 126-166, 131.

supplementary addition to each other. For, whereas the Geertzian school argues for cultural meaning of symbols—the ethos; the Turnerian schools continues from there to point to the reality that combining the pieces of meanings from cultural characters in ritual processes can be prescriptive of moral order and values for a culturally specific people for social transformations.¹⁸

Second, their description settles with Akan *ahyensodee*, as explained earlier, literally, that which represents another subject, experience, reality, or event for a people. *Ahyensodee* is that piece, which signify, or point to a reality for a people, or make those who know the metaphor embedded in the reality understand what that *ahyensodee* (= the symbol) represents. Geertz holds this understanding of symbol (it is therefore, Geertzian). Ordered symbols (*ahyensodee*) in rituals identify for the Akan people what constitutes good morals and values in their setting, thus also serving as prescriptive symbols for the transformations of their society—an understanding, which is also Turner's (therefore, Turnerian).

As a matter of interest, the explanations of symbols of these two schools of symbolic anthropology and their proposed, albeit, goals describe what the Adinkra Symbols do for the Akans—they provide meaning into their culture, and also prescribe what is constitutive of values and morality for them. Therefore, the inclusive definition of the concept symbol as provided in Comb and Freedman's definition is very appropriate for this work. We can conclude that symbols in this understanding have transmission properties, because the creators of such symbols usually intend those symbols to transmit the metaphor, myths and their prescriptive values and the intended

¹⁸ Ibid., 131.

moral affirmations they carry, from one generation of the people of that culture to another—thus symbols are metaphorical memory anchors.

The Adinkra Symbols

The Adinkra Symbols of the Akans of Ghana are art pieces that serve as metaphorical memory anchors for the Akan people. To a large extent, the Adinkra Symbols serve the same purposes of embodying and transmitting metaphors and myths from one generation of Akans to another. I will discuss the Adinkra Symbols within the context of this understanding of symbols in Chapter one. I will also explain how the Adinkra Symbols have evolved, and how Ghanaians have intrinsically continued to weave the Adinkra Symbols into the political, social, and religious fiber of their country in Chapters three to four.

My field research led to some suggestions. I will list some of them in this work. I will illustrate that symbols, which communicate religious meanings for a people like the way the Adinkra Symbols do for the Akans of Ghana, may constitute sources for doing theology. From the research, I will also demonstrate that when people employ symbols like the Adinkra Symbols in doing ethnotheology,¹⁹ they will facilitate the ingrain of the Christian faith in deep ways in the life of the Akan people. The acceptance of the Adinkra Symbol ethnotheology will facilitate the needed turning of loyalty to local traditional religions in Ghana from competing with the God's missionary goal of turning the Ghanaian people to allegiance in Jesus, the Christ, in Christianity. Again, I will submit that until the Akans of Ghana, like all peoples around the globe, can do theology

¹⁹ I am using the term ethnotheology to describe those theological articulations, which take the culture of the receiving community seriously, and employ it in the theological conversations.

with and from their own cultural sources (i.e. ethnotheology), the Christian faith will continue to be seen as a foreign religion among them. As the Nigerian Ndiokwere bemoans:

I think that the Synod should encourage Africans to deepen their Christian faith so as to inculturate it in the African traditions. This is the biggest challenge to Christianity in the continent. **Faith which does not become culture is likely to remain not fully accepted and lived. I think that an African is not fully Christian until he is able to think and express in African ways his experience of Christ** ... the inevitable conclusion is that solutions to these problems will only be found when the rich resources of African initiative, creativity and spirituality are brought to bear on these problems in a way which has not hitherto been attempted.²⁰

For Ndiokwere, theology, which does not employ the cultural realities of a people, does not even make those people Christians. For that purpose, I will demonstrate the critical role of the Adinkra Symbols in facilitating this process. In the search for appropriate sources for doing ethnotheology, in the face of the need for relevant expressions for trying to understand the Christian faith for themselves, people's sources for the theological enterprise will continue to differ from one setting to another. However, for Ghana, and mainly, among the Akans of that nation, I will illustrate that the Adinkra Symbols will constitute excellent sources for the ethnotheology initiative.

Some questions guided the search for appropriate contextual theology for the Akan people. I questioned how Jesus Christ would have lived among the Akans people if He had come as an Akan person? I wondered about what metaphors for living He would have used for expressing His knowledge of God for the Akan person? What food, what clothes would He have used, and more specifically, what themes in Akan culture and

²⁰ Nathaniel I. Ndiokwere, *The African Church, Today and Tomorrow* (Nigeria: Snaap Press Ltd, 1994), 5-6. Emphasis mine.

traditions would have constituted realities for Him to use for revealing God to the Akan people? My questions are pregnant with the presupposition that God had by prevenient grace, been preparing the Akan people, for God's mission among them. I intend to argue that the Adinkra Symbols are a significant part of whatever God has been using for preparing the Akan people for His ultimate revelation and salvation among them.

This work is therefore, going to demonstrate how to use the Adinkra Symbols for doing ethnotheology for the Akan people of Ghana. Larry W. Caldwell's²¹ ethnohermeneutic proposals will largely influence the conceptualization and articulation of my Adinkra Symbolic ethnotheology proposal.

In contemporary Ghana, the Adinkra Symbols are accepted as realities that are Ghanaian by almost all Ghanaians, if not all. According to Odenaho Dr. Afram Brempong III²² the Adinkra Symbols are even vested now in the government of Ghana on behalf of the people of Ghana. Therefore, discussions of the Adinkra Symbols are an all-Ghanaian affair. both literature and ethnographic interviews will be mainly informed this dissertation.

²¹ Larry Caldwell is Dean and Chief Academic Officer and Professor of Intercultural Studies at Sioux Falls Seminary in Sioux Falls South Dakota. He doubles also as the Director of Training and Strategy for Converge Worldwide (formerly Baptist General Conference). For the past 40 years, Caldwell has been contending that the western historical-critical method for doing hermeneutics has been a debilitating imposition on trained personnel from theological academies in the majority world. He has submitted that hermeneutical enterprise has to indispensably take into account the cultures of the receptor communities.

²² Nana Kusi Buachi alias Odenaho Dr. Afram Brempong III, is the Paramount chief of the Suma Traditional Area (British Gyaman) in Ghana. His great grand Ancestor was Nana Kwadwo Adinkra who created the first of the symbols that circulate around the world today as the Adinkra Symbols. I interview him on the historical, religious and social significance of the Adinkra Symbols, and other related issues. (Later in this dissertation, I am going to be referring to him as the "Sumamanhene," which means the paramount chief of the Suma people.

Outline of the Dissertation

In chapter 1, I will discuss the scope and the methodology of this dissertation. I will explain the theoretical framework for the dissertation—Semiotic Anthropological Ontology. This conceptual framework is appropriate for this dissertation, which is a contextual theology in the anthropological model.

In chapter 2, I will evaluate some of the literature on the origins of the Adinkra Symbols. I will limit myself to five main books for discussing the theories of sources of the Adinkra Symbols. The five books are works by Joseph Boakye Danquah, Nkansah-Obrempong, Robert Rattray, Adolph H. Agbo, and Kwaku Boateng. I will also point out the strengths and weaknesses of the theories in those works. I will analyze these works of literature in the light of data from my ethnographic research.²³

In chapter 3, I will discuss the Adinkra Symbols regarding symbolic rhetoric from the experiences of the creators of those Symbols. Kwesi Yankah's Textile Rhetoric²⁴ and Barber's symbol as texts²⁵ will mainly inform and undergird the main discussions in that chapter. I will explain the Adinkra Symbols regarding such rhetoric. The Adinkra Symbols as rhetoric may lead to identifying the type of communications the Adinkra

²³ The search for the origins of the Adinkra Symbols are important for at least three reasons. First, it helps identify the creator(s) of the Adinkra Symbols, and then provide us with information on why and how they created the Symbols. Second, I needed to identify the immediate rhetoric that the creators of the symbols assigned specific Adinkra Symbols through the why and the how of their creations. The search provided prototype procedures for identifying the immediate contextual meanings and significances of other Adinkra Symbols. I saw this information as very important for my presupposition that the Adinkra Symbols were created as landmarks for the religious experiences of their creator(s).

²⁴ Kwesi Yankah, *Speaking for the Chief: Okyeame and the Politics of Akan Royal Oratory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 81-83.

²⁵ Karin Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 200.

Symbols do. The realization that the Adinkra Symbols are texts will also lead to the discovery of the great religious belief symbolisms which some of the Adinkra Symbols transmit. Again, the search for the traditional intentions of the Adinkra Symbols will help us to identify the large religious undergirding of Akan socio-cultural realities. I will therefore, discuss the religious orientations of the Akans in chapter 4.

In Chapter 4, I will discuss the Adinkra Symbols as issues for revealing the religiosity of the Akans. Toward that goal, I will explain what the Adinkra Symbols have meant for Akans in the early years of the Akan kingdoms. I will also show how Ghanaians in contemporary times have entextualized (i.e., given meaning to, and employed) the Adinkra Symbols, as well as how they have applied the Adinkra Symbols to their new social, political, and religious contexts. Again, from these discoveries, I will propose how the Adinkra Symbols can help to uncover the notorious religious predispositions of the Akan people as the central reason why there is a religious subtext or undergirding for the Akan people in almost all aspects of their lives.

In chapter 5, I will use the data from the research to demonstrate ways by which we can do the Adinkra Symbol theology for the Akan people by using their own cultural resources. To give a realistic appearance to my propositions, I will provide a paradigm about how to use the Adinkra Symbols for teaching or doing ethnotheology in Akan people's Churches. From my research data, I will outline three stories/sermons from the Adinkra Symbols, in an appendix, for illustrating how to build theologies from some of the Adinkra Symbols in this dissertation with regard to the Sovereignty of God, and the Church as the Family of God

I will also evaluate the rhetoric of the symbols in the light of Scripture and comments from my focus groups, some of which doubled as ethnohermeneutic communities of literate informants and non-literate informants.²⁶ I assembled the literate informants from the Ayigya Methodist Church, Atwima Koforidua Methodist Church in Kumasi and the St. Peter's Methodist Church at Ashiaman. Through these ethnohermeneutic communities, I tested the Adinkra Symbols approach to ethnotheology. The responses from the ethnohermeneutic communities gave the indication that the Adinkra symbolic theological approach, which nuances using the Adinkra Symbols, may be very effective.

In the conclusion, I will make recommendations about issues that I realized need to be given attention and address in further research engagements toward making the Adinkra Symbol ethnotheology popular and easy for the Akan people to understand and use.

I noted that the authors of most of the literature, which discussed the Adinkra Symbols that I read, did not write primarily for the purpose of Adinkra ethnotheology. They wrote them, largely, for describing and explaining, what the Adinkra Symbols are.

My dissertation explores the use the Adinkra Symbols for ethnotheology for the Akan people. I was therefore limited by way of accessing literature for my work. This issue compelled me to resort to taking some information from even YouTube videos and Google searches for writings on the Adinkra Symbols—something, which I know standard research and writing does not encourage. However, I discovered very good literary sources for explaining or defining the Adinkra Symbols in the limited books I

²⁶ In chapter 1 I will explain the concepts “literate and non-literate informants.”

accessed. For instance, James Nkansah-Obrempong who does a great work by discussing the revelation of God through the Adinkra Symbols stretched his discussion too widely. His book, covered issues like Akan Cultural Symbols, metaphors, Proverbs, Myths, Symbols and their implications for doing theology. With that wide array of issues, he did not make much space for the Adinkra Symbols. I very much wished he had suggested a method of interpreting the Adinkra Symbols. That would have offered me a paradigm to compare with or to follow. With that handicap, I resorted to borrowing a paradigm from Larry W. Caldwell's ethnohermeneutical propositions, which I discovered to be very efficient for the Adinkra ethnotheological enterprise.

In some parts of the dissertation, I have cited biblical texts. This is because during the ethnohermeneutic groups interactions in my research, the participants pointed out that if my work is going to be about Christian theology, then I have to support issues I discuss with biblical texts. Prof. Asiamah of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, the current Kumasi Diocesan Lay Chairman of the Methodist Church Ghana, even said: "Without biblical support, your work can be anything, and not necessarily, for Christian theology."

I intend to write "Adinkra Symbol(s)" with capital letters to show that they are the main concepts I am discussing in this work. The use of the initial capitals for the "Adinkra Symbol(s)" is also intended to show that the Symbols are religious texts for the Akan people.

Chapter 1

The Problem and Research Methodology



Figure 2

Hwemudua or *Hwehwemudua* (literally, = a yardstick, or a standard for research or investigation towards ascertaining realities of high quality)

The *Hwemudua* is a symbol of critical investigation of high-quality products or standards. Bruce W. Willis says the *Hwemudua* refers to a “measuring rod.”²⁷ Peter Achampong agrees that it is a reference to a measuring rod and a valuing scale. Achampong, therefore, describes the significance of the Adinkra *Hwemudua* symbol in these terms: “Scales and measuring rods are devices used to ascertain the extent of quality of things by comparison with a fixed unit or with an object of known size to determine the degree of excellence, it is a means of quality control.”²⁸ It is no wonder that the *Hwemudua* Adinkra Symbol was, until recently, the logo of the Ghana Standards Board. Again, until recently, this Adinkra Symbols was fixed to every product that was approved and sold in Ghana. I am using the *Hwemudua* Symbol at the start of this dissertation to indicate that I produced this dissertation from thorough research.

²⁷ Bruce W Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary: A Visual Primer on the Language of Adinkra* (Washington, DC: The Pyramid Complex, 1998), 116.

²⁸ Peter Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols* (Kumasi: Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Printing Press, 2008), 7.

Statement of the Problem

Contemporary scholarship largely accepts that there are many epistemologies among ethnic peoples around the world. One would have expected that the affirmation of the reality of this multiplicity of cognitive orientations around the globe to have generated contextual constructions of realities and theologies, at least, as a reasonable deduction. However, that does not appear to be the case. Western scholarship's largely insistence that there is one hermeneutic approach seems to have contributed to the reality that there are not many divergent theological approaches. Caldwell argues that the critical historical approach to hermeneutics, which insists on the diachronic-synchronic methodology as biblical scholarship have continued to contribute to this one way of doing theology issue.²⁹ As Caldwell explains:

It is the same attitude that many seminary and graduate school professors have today regarding the best methodologies to follow to obtain an advance theological degree. Though the subject matter is different, the logic is the same. It goes something like this: "if a majority world student is in my program, they will fail if they do not follow accepted minority world methods that ultimately produce a written thesis or dissertation."³⁰

The limiting reality of Western professors' insistence on using Western hermeneutical methods even by students from the majority world before they get degrees has not encouraged cultural settings to develop appropriate hermeneutical methods for themselves. The realization that there are differences in epistemologies should have meant for theologians that a people's epistemological orientation is both critical and

²⁹ Caldwell Larry W., "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics: Re-Evaluating New Testament Hermeneutical Models for Intercultural Bible Interpreters Today," *Asian Journal of Theology* 1, no. 2 (1987): 314–333, 315.

³⁰ Larry W. Caldwell, "Ethnohermeneutics and Advance Theological Studies: Towards Culturally Appropriate Methodologies for Degree Programs" (Evangelical Missiological Society National Conference, Dallas, TX, 2017), 2.

indispensable for teaching and doing theology among particular peoples. Stephen B. Bevens, the Roman Catholic contextual theologian, has therefore suggested that there has to be different approaches/methods to doing theologies.³¹ However, this does not seem to be largely what we still observe. For instance, Caldwell mentions a professor at the seminary where he had his first year in seminary that made a startling statement in class that if Jesus or Paul were in his hermeneutics class, they would have failed."³² The reason the professor gave for which he would have failed both Jesus Himself and Paul was that their hermeneutics does not follow the historical-critical diachronic-synchronic method.

We have noted with interest that all peoples around the world have some form of symbols for communication, and also for being communicated to. However, for people of the "majority world,"³³ symbols occupy a tremendous and commanding space as a facility for ascertaining reality even in the sacred space. David Morgan³⁴ points out, for instance, that the Hindu use of symbols as the abode of deities and for religious mediation in Asia is widespread.³⁵ In African communities, the use of symbols for epistemological purposes is so ingrained. Jean-Marc Éla has, therefore, argued that any Christianity that takes away symbolism from the African peoples deprives them of "their self-awareness and tears them away from the reality that has integrated them into the very system by

³¹ Stephan B. Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Revised and Expanded edition (New York: ORBIS Books, 2013), 3-4, 9-15.

³² Caldwell, "Ethnohermeneutics and Advance Theological Studies: Towards Culturally Appropriate Methodologies for Degree Programs." 1.

³³ By majority world, I am referring to Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where it has been largely recognized that Christianity is growing exponentially

³⁴ David Morgan is the Phyllis and Richard Duesenberg Professor in Christianity and the Arts, and Professor of Humanities and Arts at Christ College, Valparaiso University

³⁵ David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 48-49.

which, through these symbols, they are striving to overcome the contradictions between life and death."³⁶ In a conversation with Archbishop Emeritus Peter Akwasi Sarpong³⁷ In Kumasi, he reaffirmed Éla's conclusions and submitted that the Adinkra Symbols were not the earlier forms of writing, which the Akans developed, but that they were merely symbols in line with the Akan's way of communicating and appreciating reality.³⁸

Even with these discoveries, it seems that we have yet to realize the significance and extensive use of symbols for doing theology. This dissertation, therefore, sets out to investigate how the Adinkra Symbols can serve as a window into the Akan religious culture, and to examine how the Adinkra Symbols can also facilitate the contextualization of theology for the Akans of Ghana.

The research is necessitated by the reality that after over five hundred years of Christian presence in Ghana,³⁹ The country continues to struggle with issues, which show that the roots of the faith have not been integrated in the right ways with the multifaceted concerns confronting the country. They include reported corruption in public offices and other social and developmental cancers.

Research questions

My research questions were:

1. How do people use the Adinkra Symbols within Ghanaian secular and Christian spaces?

³⁶ Jean-Marc Éla, *My Faith as an African*: (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2009), 35.

³⁷ Peter Sarpong is a trained cultural anthropologist, and he served as the Roman Catholic Bishop, and later Archbishop for many years in Kumasi.

³⁸ Sarpong, Interview on the Religious and Social Significance of the Adinkra Symbols.

³⁹ See Hans W. Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana* (Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1967), 13-17. And, Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (New York: Orbis Books, 1983), 22-25.

2. How do the Adinkra Symbols facilitate contextualization of theology among Akans?
3. How has the Church in Ghana used the Adinkra Symbols in the Churches for teaching?

How can the Adinkra Symbols facilitate doing theology among the Akans of Ghana?

Research Background

The compelling reason(s) for this research is also multifaceted, generating from multiple backgrounds. First, even though the majority of Ghanaians declare that they are Christians, the ways they live their political, economic, and social lives do not show a people whose ethical drives are motivated by Christian orientations. For instance, 71.2 percent of Ghanaians declared that they are Christians according to the 2012 population census.⁴⁰ This suggests that early Christian interventions, as well as the subsequent ones, have been very successful; however, with such a presumably big Christian presence in Ghana, one would have expected the values and virtues of the Christian faith to permeate and positively influence the social, religious, political, and economic fibers of the Ghanaian society morally. Sadly, this does not seem to be the reality. Even though most political players claim they are Christians, corruption is reported in many public service spaces. The issue of corruption in public spaces seemed to have become so much of national concern that fighting it was part of the main issues the incumbent President Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo's campaign promised. Again, he addressed the issue in his inaugural address on December 7, 2016. In that address, the president warned that

⁴⁰ [Ghana Population - GhanaWeb](https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/geography/population.php) "Ghana Population." <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/geography/population.php> (12/12/2017).

anyone who thinks that he is coming into his government for making personal and undue money should rather go into the private sector because he will not tolerate corruption. He reiterated, “public service is what it is, public service.”⁴¹ Corruption has had debilitating social consequences on the living conditions of the Ghanaian people. In fact, the cancer is so endemic in Ghana that in Obuasi, a mining town in Ghana, somebody has started a school with the primary aim of training a new generation of Ghanaians who will refuse to be corrupted and driven into corruption.⁴² There seems to be a desperate need for an attempt to make Christianity dialogue deeply with life in Ghana for social, religious, and political transformation. The Adinkra Symbols appear as one promising key to opening that door. The other reasons for this research are included below the following.

Folk Religion and Split-Level Christianity

Let us look at the issue of folk religion and split-level Christianity first. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Africans like William Wade Harris and Sampson Oppong did mission in the Gold Coast. Their missionary activities introduced two important dimensions to Christianity. One of the issues was the introduction of exorcism and dealing with spiritual realities. Their deliverance ministries had exorcised people of witches, demons, and other negative spiritual realities. The other issue was that because of the exorcism ministries, tens of thousands of conversions and unprecedented revivals in Ghana became the order of the day; however, the fires of revival, which their missions kindled, does not seem to have been sustained with equal fuelling after the missionaries left. Until the last decades of the twentieth century, the type of Christianity, which the

⁴¹ Addo, Akufo Presidential Inaugural Speech. www.myjoyonline.com/news/.../full-text-president-akufo-addos-inaugural-speech.php (10/16/2017).

⁴² See the school’s sign board in Appendix 1

mission Churches in Ghana seemed to have articulated was the type, which the enlightenment presuppositions of the West undergirded. The mission-founded Methodist, Presbyterian, and the Anglican Churches, largely, held the link between African spiritual realities and the doctrines of the local Churches.⁴³ According to Rt. Rev. Nuh Ben Abubekr, a former bishop of the Kumasi Diocese of the Methodist Church in Ghana in the 1980s, prospective candidates to ministry in the Methodist Church were asked some routine questions in the final interviews. One of the questions was about how the candidates knew they had received a call into ministry. According to the bishop, candidates who said that they had a dream in which they saw the Lord calling them or telling them to serve Him in ministry were either discouraged or dropped.⁴⁴

However, in African cosmologies, spiritual realities are as real as the physical, and the break in spirituality from the physical created an uncomfortable and answer-demanding space in those types of Christianities. Hiebert, Tiénou, and Shaw explain that the model that Western missionaries used in introducing Christianity to other parts of the world, which was undergirded by the Enlightenment worldview,⁴⁵ made a separation between natural and supernatural realities. The Enlightenment structure for mission also adored science and only “gave naturalistic explanations that had no place for God and submitted that religion and beliefs in the supernatural heavenly realities were only rooted in the faith, not facts. Science was seen as public truth to be studied by all. Religion, to

⁴³ The Church of Pentecost, which evolved from the Christ Apostolic Church, which was the Church that re-ignited Holy Spirit gifts and operations, and for that matter, took spiritual realities seriously as part of the faith and practice of the Church dates their origin around 1922. See, www.dutchchurchofpentecost.nl/a-brief-history-of-the-church-of-pentecost/

⁴⁴ The superannuated Bishop has alluded to this several times in conversations with me.

⁴⁵ Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tité Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Baker Academic, 2000), 16.

the missionaries of that epoch, was a matter of personal choice.”⁴⁶ The issue that mission-founded Churches played down some spiritual realities, especially related to how integrated spirituality is in the African cosmology, led to even Church members going to sources outside of the Church, which included traditional sources for solutions to their spiritual problems.

According to Hiebert, Tiénou, and Shaw, these scientific paradigms proved inefficient in making people change their worldviews, culture, or make them reject their traditional religious orientations, which were so real to them.⁴⁷ Instead, it created the vacuum, which has always been filled with the traditional religions of peoples. Therefore, the traditional religions of the areas where missionaries were always resurfaced to challenge Christianity. An obvious handicap of this Enlightenment-oriented approach to missions was that it did not accord an extensive dialogue with the cultures of the receiving peoples; therefore, they lost the use of cultural texts that could have been very useful for missionary projects. Writers like Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou today look back to this primary shortcoming in earlier missionary interventions as part of the causes of split-level Christianity in parts of the world.⁴⁸ Peter Sarpong, reimagining this split-level Christianity in the context of Ghanaian Christianity, says that many Christians in Ghana today are like frogs that jump in and out of the water as it suits

⁴⁶ Hiebert and Shaw, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 16-17.

⁴⁷ Paul G. Hiebert and R. Daniel Shaw, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Baker Academic, 2000), 13, 16-17.

⁴⁸ Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou, 15-20.

them.⁴⁹ By this, Sarpong, like Hiebert, Tiénou, and Shaw, in their definition of split-level Christianity mean that Christians in Ghana, to use the words of Sidney Williams:

Live on two unreconciled levels. They are members of the Church and ascribe to the statement of faith. But below the system of conscious belief are deeply embedded traditions and customs implying quite a different interpretation of the universe and the world of spirits from the Christian interpretation.⁵⁰

These are the problems that I identify in the Ghanaian religious landscape. I presupposed that when we communicate theology in the symbolic religious orientation of the Adinkra symbolizations, they will become more meaningful for Akans.

Place of African Theology in Global Theological Discussions

I identified that another reason why symbolization for Akan theology has to be taken seriously is that African theology has found acceptance in global settings of critical theologization. Tennent,⁵¹ Ott, Netland, and Shenk⁵² have made persuasive submissions for the need for African theology as a voice to be recognized for enriching the global theologization enterprise of contemporary times. What is more, African theologians are searching for forms of theological expressions, which will be anthropologically African, and which we can use in the Church setting for Christian discipleship purposes. For that purpose, African symbols have received much attention. Africans have used many symbols and motives for theological expressions and purposes. Stinton, for instance, catalogs some of the symbols proposed for Christology. For example, Stinton's work lists

⁴⁹ Peter K. Sarpong, *Peoples Differ* (Legon, Accra, Ghana: Sub-Saharan Pub & Traders, 2002), 18.

⁵⁰ Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 15.

⁵¹ Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think about and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2007).

how Africans are trying to construct a theological paradigm, first for Africans, and again, as Africa's contribution to the global theological voice.⁵³

Bediako, in a specific case, in trying to serve the same need, has critically argued for a Christology of Christ as our ancestor for the African context.⁵⁴ Again, Jay Moon, having done missions in Ghana for about ten years, affirms the important place symbolization and semiotic investigations have in the Ghanaian context. In his specific case, Moon has advanced what he calls “Chicken Theology” from the Ghanaian linguistic symbols of proverbs.⁵⁵ Issues like the few African attempts to contribute a theological voice show that theology in Africa is crying for a Christian faith that does not sacrifice Africans’ anthropological realities. Again, the African theological voices show that African theologians are taking the issue of symbols, which Africa has in abundance, seriously for theology. This search for an African voice and identity for theology is necessary because like all theologies, African theology seeks to make Africans understand their faith. This is an important issue, which Bevans acknowledges as the purpose for doing theology.⁵⁶

The need for Africans to have a theological expression that is their own has been extensively acknowledged, and we cannot emphasize that enough. For instance, in 2008

⁵³ Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2004).

⁵⁴ Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective* (Asempa Publishers Christian Council of Ghana, 1990). See also Kwame Bediako, Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion (Orbis Books, 1997), 216-230.

⁵⁵ W. Jay Moon, *African Proverbs Reveal Christianity in Culture: A Narrative Portrayal of Builsa Proverbs Contextualizing Christianity in Ghana* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2009).

⁵⁶ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 3.

the pope made a far-reaching call for it in Malawi, which affirmed the Roman Catholic position on how the Church has to do mission and discipleship. He said:

The Synod Fathers rightly affirmed that “a serious concern for a true and balanced inculturation is necessary in order to avoid cultural confusion and alienation in our fast evolving society.” During my visit to Malawi I made the same point: “*I put before you today a challenge—a challenge to reject a way of living which does not correspond to the best of your traditions, and your Christian faith. Many people in Africa look beyond Africa for the so-called ‘freedom of the modern way of life.’ Today I urge you to look inside yourselves. Look to the riches of your own traditions, look to the faith, which we are celebrating in this assembly. Here you will find genuine freedom—here you will find Christ who will lead you to the truth.*”⁵⁷

Even though the papal exhortation appears to be primarily about traditions in general since symbols are inextricable parts of culture and ultimately traditions, it can be said that the use of traditions in the appeal is inclusive of the symbolic realities of any peoples. In using Akan symbols for contextual theology, two issues were observed. First, we used realities that were not only common among Akans for theology but were also situated in Akan epistemological orientations. Second, we used symbols, which the Akans do not only widely appreciate for their (i.e., the symbols') aesthetic importance, but again, we will be using realities that have widespread meanings among them.

Africa's Symbolic Orality

As indicated earlier, symbols occupy a large space in African reality and communication. In trying to make the case for the indispensable place symbols have in African communication, Éla says that to use symbols in African Christianity is another way by which Christianity can save Africans from the anthropologically-pauperized

⁵⁷ John Paul II, “Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*.” www.vatican.va/.../apost_exhortations/: on 26th March 2008), 17.

reality in Africa and offer Africans a facility for self-rediscovery.⁵⁸ Éla builds his conclusions on the following observations he made about symbols in Africa. According to him, Africa is a continent extremely rich in signs and symbols.⁵⁹ He explains that the African universe is one in which “all things speak, [and] signs play an important role in every socio-religious practice.”⁶⁰ For Éla, African civilization is one of symbols, and in that type of civilization, relationships between human beings, and relationships between human beings and nature pass through the invisible places of the symbolic as a unique way of maintaining their relationship to the universe.⁶¹ Éla contends that it is in Africa’s symbolic space that all reality acquires meaning. According to Éla, therefore, African reality is invisible, and that the visible is only appearance and symbols.

From these observations, I agree with Éla in his significant comments that any type of Christianity that takes away symbolism deprives Africans of “their self-awareness and tears them away from the reality that has integrated them into the very system by which; through these symbols, they are striving to overcome the contradictions between life and death.”⁶²

Symbols in Africa are multifaceted; they include issues like “oral expressions, gestures, rituals, actions, and so on, embracing institutions, objects and beings.”⁶³ Therefore, the person who wears anthropological lenses identifies these peculiarities of African peoples and how they appreciate realities. For instance, even from the settings of Akans, which I am relatively more conversant with, I realize that symbolism is very

⁵⁸ Éla, *My Faith as an African*. 33-50.

⁵⁹ Éla., 34.

⁶⁰ Éla., 34.

⁶¹ Éla., 35

⁶² Éla., 35.

⁶³ Éla., 35

central to understanding Akans and the language they use for communication. The Akan language is sometimes nonverbal expressions, and sometimes, even dance forms. Éla's observation has massive support from the observations of other African anthropologists—two of such contributions were helpful here.

First, the Archbishop Emeritus Peter Akwasi Sarpong, cultural anthropologist, pleads:

It is important for the [African] minister to remember that African traditional religion and culture put much store by rituals and ceremonies. These are of sacramental value. They cause what they signify. One cannot think of African religion or life without externals such as gestures, symbols, signs depicting some innermost realities.⁶⁴

Sarpong's call for recognizing gestures, symbols, and signs in the religious space of Africans became very important motivation for my research. Again, Achampong⁶⁵ argues:

The Akan culture is a religious culture. In whatever one is engaged, one is fully involved in a religious experience. **Hence these symbols [meaning the Adinkra symbols] do not only express ideas about life in general but concepts about God and religious belief.**⁶⁶

Let us try to understand, at least briefly, what the Adinkra symbols are.

⁶⁴ Peter Akwasi Sarpong, "What Priesthood for Africa?" in *Theological Education in Africa: Quo Vadimus*, eds., J.S. Pobee and J.N. Kudadjie (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1990), 6-17.

⁶⁵ Peter Achampong is a Roman Catholic in Kumasi. He argues in his book, "Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols," which had Archbishop Emeritus Peter Sarpong, write a Preface, that the Adinkra Symbols point to issues that the knowledge and worship of God, ii.

⁶⁶ Peter K. Sarpong, "Foreword" in, Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*. iv. Emphasis mine.

What are the Adinkra Symbols?

The concept of a symbol as used in this dissertation carries the idea of realities, which carry metaphors of stories or religious myths. As I indicated in the General Introduction, Comb and Freedman's definition of the concept of a symbol is what has encouraged my affirmation and the use of symbol in this dissertation. I am reflecting their definition in this work because their definition, unlike Turner,⁶⁷ nuances around structural functionalism to give a basic and a widely-encompassing definition of the concept symbol. According to them, a symbol is a carrier of a metaphorical story or a religious myth. They explain that the symbol that carries the metaphorical stories or religious myths can be "words, objects, mental images, and ceremonies among other—in which a richness of meaning is crystallized."⁶⁸ A symbol may transmit messages at two levels. On one hand, it may communicate about itself as an aesthetic image. This is especially so in periods when the intended meaning of that symbol is lost to a people. On the other hand, that symbol may also transmit metaphorical stories, myths, or rhetoric, which its creator intended it to crystallize, carry, and broadcast to the people of the creator's culture and possibly the generation after them. For instance, when Moses by the inspiration of Yahweh instituted the Passover meal, that symbolism was intended to carry the myth of Yahweh's mighty deliverance of His people, the Israelites, as a memorial for both the contemporaries of Moses and also for the unborn generations of the Israelites (see Ex. 12:14, 25–27).

⁶⁷ Victor W. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (USA, N.Y.,: Cornell University Press, 1967), 19.

⁶⁸ Gene Combs and Jill Freedman, *Symbol Story and Ceremony*, xiv.

The functions of the Adinkra Symbols of the Akans of Ghana were originally intended to fall into this second level understanding of symbols. As such, the Adinkra Symbols are largely, carriers of rhetoric or metaphorical messages. As I explain under the next subheading.

The Use of Adinkra Symbols in Akan Religious Spaces

The Adinkra Symbols are images created largely from the religious experiences of their original creators for carrying rhetoric, metaphors, or myths that they represent. The Akans largely understand the rhetoric or metaphorical messages, which the Adinkra symbols carry and transmit. The Adinkra Symbols, therefore, serve as guides, signposts, and matrixes for what Akans consider a good life. We have to note that for Akans, like almost all Africans, a good life is a religious one. For them, all of life is religious. We can conclude that the Adinkra Symbols are metaphorical guides for good religious living.

This, however, does not mean that all the Adinkra Symbols are religious symbols. In chapter 3, for instance, I mention that even in contemporary times, people continue to create Adinkra Symbols, which carry rhetoric that are not directly religious. For instance, the *Wo foro dua pa a na ye pia wo* Symbol below is not directly a religious symbol—it is more of a social and a motivational reality.

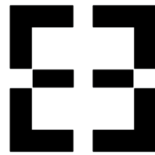


Figure 3

Wo foro dua pa a na ye pia wo
Rhetorically, it means, “It is when (or if)
you undertake a good cause, that people will
support you.”

The socially beneficial acts attract social support understanding of the above Adinkra Symbol seems to be the reason undergirding Sarpong's description of the Adinkra Symbols as:

the age-old pictorial presentation of the values that have stood Akans in good stead for so long. These symbols are many. The Adinkra Symbols are [also] extensively used to express feelings and sentiments that one may be undergoing at a particular moment.⁶⁹

I can, therefore, conclude that the Adinkra Symbols are generally more of an issue for anthropological expressions for Akans as they engage in the business of making a living as social, ethical, religious, economic, political, and emotional persons. The understanding articulated above seemed to be why the Adinkra Symbols have become not just decorative pieces in corporate offices, architectural embellishments, and as textile aesthetic pieces, but have also assumed their significant roles as “artistic rhetoric” even in clothing and jewelry, which the Akan people use to communicate messages of all types,⁷⁰ including religious ones explained below.

In my literature research, I noted that writers have argued that people use the Adinkra predominantly for their aesthetic beauty, and not intentionally for their theological importance. However, I also discovered that there is an extensive evaluation of the Adinkra Symbols as religious symbols.⁷¹ Some of the earliest academic, religious evaluations of the Adinkra symbols date as far back as the first decades of the twentieth century when Rattray wrote on them. After observing the deep religious significance of Asante art, including the Adinkra symbols, Rattray concluded that if the West had not

⁶⁹ Peter Sarpong, “Foreword,” in Peter Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, v.

⁷⁰ See Appendix 10 for some illustrations of this popularity of Adinkra symbols

⁷¹ There are a few, however, who have done some form of theological evaluations of some of the symbols. An example is J.B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, 1944.

disturbed the development of the Asante religion, it is possible that the Asante people would have come up with their own messiah.⁷²

The use of Adinkra Symbols in religious spaces among Akans seems to date back centuries earlier. Meyerowitz shows that religious persons were using the Adinkra Symbols in traditional religious temples for both their aesthetic significance and as religious rhetoric. For example, in chapter 4, I have posted a photograph said, which is said to have been taken in the early 1920s of a traditional Akan shrine. This shrine has a photograph of a traditional priestess standing in the doorway of traditional temple (or shrine). At the base of the walls, there was the *Dweninimmen*, the Adinkra symbol for strength. Therefore, the use of the symbols in the windows of St. Peter's Basilica in Kumasi, which I alluded to in the General Introduction to this dissertation, is only an reaffirmation of the Akan traditional religious rhetoric that the Adinkra Symbols carry.

Method and Theory for Dealing with and for Resolving the Problem

This research is primarily ethnographic and therefore, required fieldwork. However, other sources were employed in the search for data. I drew data from three main sources:

1. published research and other relevant publications;
2. interviews and participant observation (these sources complement each other);
- and
3. focus groups interviews.

⁷² Robert. S. Rattray, *Religion, and Art in Ashanti* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), v.

Published Research and other Relevant Publications

I noted that a few books have been written about the Adinkra symbols. For instance, I started the search for relevant books with Jasmine Danzy's dissertation to the Stony Brook University for a Master of Arts degree. Though Danzy wrote that dissertation for linguistic purposes, his bibliography has a good number of books that directed the initial path to the literary sources for data for my research. His work was good especially for the search for the origins of the Adinkra Symbols, which I discussed extensively in chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Again, I discovered a number of publications that helped as a window to the historical knowledge of God among the Akans. For instance, J. B. Danquah's "Akan Doctrine of God," and Nkansah-Obrempong's "Visual Theology" were helpful in that regard. Danquah, for instance, uses the *Agye Nyame* Symbol⁷³ as part of his argument for the Akan knowledge of God.⁷⁴ These sources, in turn, lead to other relevant sources, and these helped to construct part of the data for this research.

Though There is a lot of literature, however, on the development and application of contextual theologies. I noted, however, that although most of the literature I read discussed the Adinkra Symbols, they were not written primarily for the purpose of theology. Since my research was in search of how to use the symbols for theology, I was limited by way of accessing literature in them for my dissertation. This issue, as I indicated in the General Introduction, compelled me to resort to taking some information on YouTube and Google searches, where I discovered a good number of literature for the dissertation.

⁷³ See figure 1

⁷⁴ Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, 37-42, 148-152.

The Ethnographic Research Method

I realized that this research was going to require nonprobability samples.⁷⁵ The reason was that the Adinkra Symbols are cultural texts of the Akan people; therefore, probability sampling was not going to work. As H. Russell Bernard explains, the search for cultural data is different from the search for individual attribute data, which requires probability or “a scientifically drawn samples.”⁷⁶ Benard, further, points out that the search for cultural data calls for an in-depth researching and sometimes requires staying with informants for months.⁷⁷ The cultural data collection research also “requires informed informants, not just responsive respondents.”⁷⁸ I, therefore, chose my informants on purpose, “and not randomly.”⁷⁹ As a nonprobability research, I spent a total of six months for my field research interviews with the purposefully selected informants. In those six months, I lived in the different locations of most of my informants. However, with the focus group interviewees who also doubled as ethnohermeneutic⁸⁰ communities, because I was gathering them on Sundays after Church services, I only met them after the teaching sessions in their local Churches. In the following paragraphs where I discuss the informants I did my research with, I will explain why I chose those informants. However, there were instances where I had to rely on informal informants for data in casual conversations or questionings.

⁷⁵ H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 4th ed. (New York: Atamira Press, 2006), 146, 186-187.

⁷⁶ Bernard, 186.

⁷⁷ Bernard, 186.

⁷⁸ Bernard, 187.

⁷⁹ Bernard, 187.

⁸⁰ I will explain the concept ethnohermeneutics later in this chapter.

Interviews and Why I Chose Informants

I conducted, on the average, three interviews with the following people as part of the data collections over a period of two years: Very Rev. Quophie Anochie Ababio, who was then the Superintendent Minister of the Ashaiman Methodist Church. I interviewed the Very Rev. Quophie Anochie Ababio because he was the chaplain of the Association of the Methodist Chiefs and Queenmothers (AMCQ) in the Kumasi Diocese of the Methodist Church in Ghana. The AMCQ was an association, which had as part of its objective, to link Christianity and culture via the deep knowledge of the Akan culture of these traditional rulers. The Ashaiman Methodist Church, where he was the Superintendent Minister, has displayed many of the Adinkra Symbols in the Church.

I also interviewed the Archbishop Emeritus Peter Akwasi Sarpong, the prolific cultural anthropologist writer, in whose time, as the Archbishop of St. Peter's Basilica, it was decorated all over with Adinkra Symbols (see Figure 1 under General Introduction). These local Church leaders were so significant in helping to understand the contemporary uses of the symbols in the Churches. I selected Archbishop Peter Sarpong for interviews because of his immense contributions to the enculturation of liturgy in Akan Roman Catholic Churches. Again, I selected him for interviews as a trailblazer in the pursuit of the use of Adinkra Symbols and other Akan symbols in doing Church in Akan Christianity.⁸¹ I convinced myself that Archbishop Emeritus Sarpong must have good

⁸¹ For a full profile and some of the contributions to interpreting Christianity in the symbols of the Akan by Peter Akwasi Sarpong, see this video interview by Joy online <http://youtu.be/MskBeCxAkHY>. For some of the conspicuous display of the Adinkra Symbols in Christian worship, which are seen in the Holy Spirit Cathedral in Accra as central parts of the communication to the congregation, and even behind the altar, see <http://youtu.be/YN7leq6kNug>. This is an indication of how the symbols are a part of Christian worship in Ghana already.

reasons for standing alone in Ghanaian Roman Catholicism for a long time in insisting on the use of Akan symbolisms as part of priestly vestments and church architecture. I saw it significant that in a Roman Catholic worship setting like the Holy Spirit Cathedral in Accra, one can count about five Adinkra symbols displayed behind the altar, in addition to one cross.

I also interviewed some of the cloth imprinters (Paul Nyamaa and Kwadwo Brobbey at Kwabre Ntonso near Kumasi).⁸² These people have a long history of embossing Adinkra Symbols in the cloths they make for royalty and ordinary people alike. I got some information about the origins of the symbols from the relatively young but very-informed Adinkra cloth producers. I realized that people continued to create and add to the number of Adinkra Symbols that the Akans have even in contemporary times.⁸³ I considered interviews with the Ntonso Adinkra cloth producers significant because Kwesi Yankah, a professor of linguistics at the University of Ghana, had argued that Ghanaians use textiles in what he calls “textile rhetoric.”⁸⁴ In that book, Yankah informs that Ghanaians continue to create symbols for cloths, and use those cloth symbols and the names to communicate various messages in the social, economic, and religious spaces of their lives. Cloth rhetoric, as Yankah calls it, is listed below as seen in *Obaatan na onim deɛ ne mma be die* in Figure 4.

⁸² Paul Nyamaa and Kwadwo Brobbey, The Origins, Social and Religious Significance of the Adinkra Symbols Paul and Kwadwo Brobbey, January 9, 2015.

⁸³ Paul Nyamaa and Kwadwo Brobbey, Interview on the origins and uses of the Adinkra Symbols Cloth (June 15, 2016)

⁸⁴ Yankah, *Speaking for the Chief*. 81-83.



Figure 4

Obaatan na onim deɛ ne mma bedie literally translated as
 “a mother is the one who really knows or cares about what
 her children will eat.”

On the first anniversary of the death of the queen of the traditional Asante Kingdom, Nana Afua Kobi Serwaa Ampem, the king, who is her son, dedicated a park to her honor. The wife of the king wore the traditional outfit, which was made with the *Obaatan na onim deɛ ne mma be die* cloth. In this cloth is the symbol of a bird that has fetched food for its hatchlings. According to my elder sister who lives and sells Ghanaian cloth in London, United Kingdom, Ghanaians in London started ordering that cloth for themselves and their mothers as appreciations for their mothers’ contributions to their lives. For an outsider, that cloth is just be beautiful piece of cloth; however, for the Akan person, the cloth is a symbolic rhetoric of deep a philosophical statement.

Again, I interviewed the following very significant persons: Nana Kusi Buachi alias Odencho Dr. Afram Brempong III, and Omanhene of the Suma Traditional Area in the Bono Ahafo Region of Ghana on the historical, religious, and social significance of the Adinkra Symbols, and other related issues.

1. Dwamena Nana Bonsie the Chief of Ehwimasi, Kwabre, Ghana, The Akan Family and the Effects of Christianity, May 30, 2016.

2. Nana Ansu Gyeabour, traditional priest of the Asante Kingdom (Nsumankwaahene), on Akan purification rituals on May 11, 2006;
3. the research officer at the Center for National Culture in Kumasi;
4. Osei Kofi, a son of the Late Antoahene, Nana Asenso Darteh, on the list of Asante kings;
5. Okyeame Quophi, a presenter at TV Africa on the corporate significance of the Adinkra Symbols on the front wall of TV Africa;
6. focus groups at Ashaiman and Kumasi; and
7. Okomfoɔ Gyakyewaa of Dixcove on Akan purification rituals.

They are all very significant people because they are either chiefs who have been interacting with the Adinkra Symbols themselves or are closely related to such chiefs. For instance, Nana Kusi Buachi is a direct descendant of Nana Adinkra, whom scholars credit with the creation of the first Adinkra Symbols. He is the paramount chief of the Suma Traditional Area in Ghana. The Suma Traditional Area is one of the three traditional states that trace their origins to original Nana Adinkra, whose kingdom was the Gyaman Kingdom. The Gyaman Kingdom is now in the Ivory Coast, but originally it extended over some of the territories that Ghana and the Ivory Coast cover today.

These interviewees provided me with significant data for the dissertation. It is easy to assume that we are fully aware of issues about our culture as emic people. In his “Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior,” American linguist Kenneth L. Pike defined the dual perspective of describing the behavior of people of specific cultures. He used the terms “emic” and “etic perspectives.” He argued that there are different ways of looking at the etic and emic perspectives. One

of the perspectives, which I used in this dissertation, is what he referred to as the “external” and the “internal” views. According to him, the etic view describes the description or analysis of a people’s culture from the standpoint of an “alien,” and it uses external criteria for that analysis. On the other hand, the emic perspective is an analysis from “an internal view, with criteria chosen from within the system.”⁸⁵ I want to use Pike’s taxonomy for describing an observation I made in my interviews.

I think that it is more difficult to understand one's culture and traditions than of people from an etic perspective. Our assumptions tend to blindfold us from asking the relevant revealing questions, whereas an outsider comes into the settings with full unassuming lenses in search of meaning. Etic researchers, therefore, ask questions, which the emic person may overlook. An illustration will be helpful here. Marvin Harris explains that the average Indian will explain to the outsider that cows are sacred, and that is why cows are not eaten. However, Marvin Harris, explains the difference in the culture of different cultural groups," and from an outsider's investigation, shows that the cow as sacred is not really the issue behind letting cows roam freely on the streets in India, but rather that cows constitute economic life and sometimes life itself for most agrarian Indians. He argues in that book that, for the peasant farmers cows are worth much more alive in India for economic reasons than they are dead.⁸⁶ I, however, will push the argument that both the etic and emic perspectives are necessary for reaching informed conclusions in research.

⁸⁵ Kenneth L. Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior* (The Hague, Paris: Mouton & Co., 1967), 38.

⁸⁶ Marvin Harris, *Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches: The Riddles of Culture*, Reissue edition (Vintage, 2011).

Locating the Researcher in the Dissertation

I have lived with some of the realities of the use of the Adinkra Symbols from my childhood days. Therefore, I am qualified to comment on my personal experience and understanding of the Adinkra Symbols as an emic person. For instance, in chapter 4, I will recount a story of how one of my great-granduncles sometimes prayed Adinkra symbolic prayers by simply touching the *Nyame biribi wɔ soro* (*ma me nsa nka*) Adinkra Symbol three times as a form of prayer.



Figure 5

Nyame biribi wɔ soro (ma me nsa nka)

I knew about such symbolic prayers even before I later read in Danquah's book that the king of Asante also prayed that prayer.⁸⁷ Such mentored knowledge of some of the issues about the Adinkra Symbols might show in my writing, even though for academic reasons I will try to suppress such emic inclusions to the voice of data from my research. I must, however, mention that the Adinkra Symbols are issues I lived with from my days as a boy. My great-granduncle was teaching me woodcarving by apprenticeship; therefore, obviously, I encountered the Adinkra Symbols and stories about them almost on a daily basis.

However, I cannot claim to know all about the Adinkra Symbols partly because people continue to create more Adinkra Symbols. Again, I have received Western

⁸⁷ J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion* (London and Redhill: Lutterworth Press, 1944), 187.

education for a far greater part of my educational life. The implications for this Western type of education has been that I have not continued to study the Adinkra Symbols deeply as would make me an authority in the issues of those symbols.

From another perspective, my Western type of education, which has been heavily informed by the scientific analysis and valuation of realities, has stood in my way toward a deeper continuous study of the Adinkra Symbols. I have also lived in a mission Church, which, until recent years, had indirectly discouraged the use of African realities for relating to Christianity and doing theology. From such a background, maybe I am a hybrid Akan, and somehow, an etic⁸⁸ person myself who needs to study my own culture with the help of other significant persons like traditional rulers, researchers, people who work with the Adinkra Symbols, and focus groups to discover what the Adinkra Symbols are for the Akans of Ghana. My use of the first person “I,” “me,” and “mine” in this dissertation are therefore impregnated with these affirmations.

Focus Groups

In this research, I solicited meaning from the Akans themselves in addition to etic explanations. I recognized that I have to do more to extricate my assumptions as an emic person from the research to be able to get an objective data for my analysis. That was part of the reason why I constituted the focus groups for interviews and reviews. The focus groups were made up of five-member pastor-lay committees who objectively discussed and evaluated how I used the Adinkra Symbols for theology. The reason for this approach was that I wanted my research to be informed through the narrative approach,

⁸⁸ I will be explaining Pike’s classifications of “emic” and “etic” in Chapter 1.

which I believed was the best for sourcing data from Ghana's oral transmission of knowledge background. I selected the focus group members with the help of the resident ministers of the Churches in which I did those interviews and did the ethnohermeneutic interviews. The focus group members sat in the Church services for the particular Sundays and listened to me teach as the guest preacher. After the worship services were closed, I met with them for the interviews and the hermeneutic analysis of the Adinkra Symbols, which I used in the Teaching sessions during the worship services. I came up with questions for them as a way of getting to know their previous knowledge of the Adinkra Symbols I used in the teaching, and whether the Adinkra Symbols made it easier for them to understand the message I shared with them or not. I also asked them to give me the reasons for whether the Adinkra Symbols made it easy for them to understand teaching or not. The members then discussed their opinions, observations, and recommendations with me. We also analyzed how viable the Adinkra ethnotheology was going to be for the Akan people.

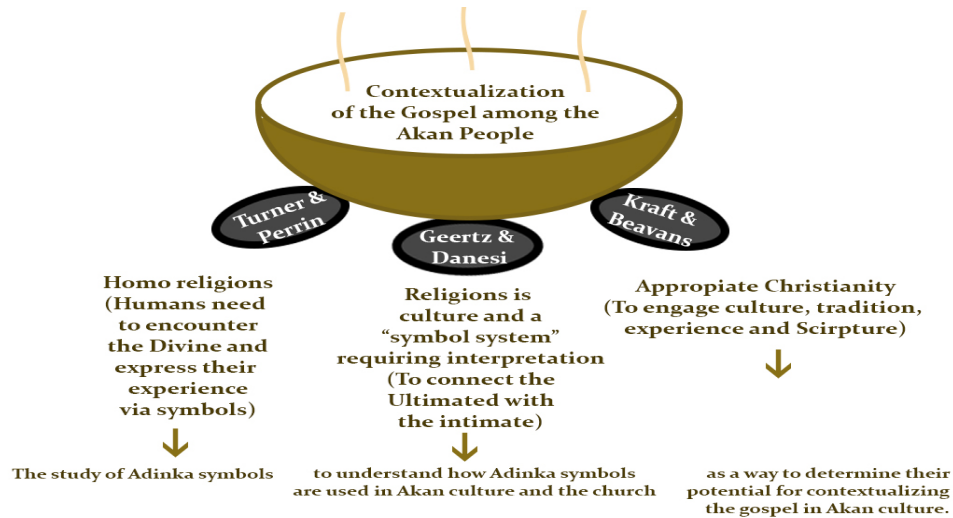
Theoretical Framework

I analyzed the data, which I got using my theoretical framework—semiotic anthropological ontology—to search for meanings, as well as the reality (or realities) to which the selected Adinkra Symbols pointed. I proposed to synthesize theories from Geertz's semiotics and H. W. Turner's anthropological ontology, with borrowings from Norman Perrin's symbols. I processed ideas from these sources into a theory I referred to as semiotic anthropological ontology. I believed that with that theory I was going to be able to investigate and analyze the missional significance of the Adinkra Symbols of the

Akans of Ghana as a way of doing theology among the Akans people of Ghana in particular, and Ghanaians in general.

Semiotic Anthropological Ontology—What is it?

Figure 6



The theory simply means that human beings, especially in the African context, are basically, religious beings⁸⁹ who encounter the divine as unfathomable through both their so-called secular and sacred spaces. This theory agrees that human beings make meaning of the divine in the limitedness of the human language through symbolic representations and models, which act as webs of significance that sustain a community’s understanding, the continuous and living out of a religious experience. Again, as webs of significance, symbols make available and facilitate communal interpretation of a people’s religious beliefs and values to inquiring outsiders. This theoretical framework, therefore, places a heavy emphasis on these issues: semiotics of the Adinkra Symbols for an illustration of what I call symbolic theology.

⁸⁹ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 1.

My hunch was that it is through the understanding of symbolism and modeling that people of specific cultures have created for themselves, the Church can help them to relate to God in conversion and fulfill the goal of missional interventions which is transformations of people (i.e. conversions), then the Adinkra Symbols as cultural texts require a search for their meanings.

How I Used the Theoretical Framework

I proceeded with the understanding that the search for their meanings was going to require getting to know the histories behind their creations. To get to the historical reasons for the Adinkra Symbols were created, therefore, required getting the stories, or traditions, or myths, which the Akan people tell about why they were created.

I had identified that many of the Adinkra Symbols had religious names and motifs. I, therefore, suspected that there must have been some religious histories/myths for their creations. The suspicion was given a driveby H. W. Turner's submission that human beings tend to create symbols from their religious experiences for perpetuating the memories of those religious experiences.⁹⁰ Turnuer has also pointed out that human beings are ontologically religious.

I, therefore, set out to do the research into the Adinkra Symbols for data to either support or refute the suspicion that Adinkra Symbols reflect the religious ontological predisposition of the Akan people. I wanted to know if the Symbols can be used to reveal the theology of the Akan people. The research was, therefore, going to employ and engage the following strands of investigations.

⁹⁰ Turner, "A Model for the Structure of Religion in Relation to the Secular." 42-64

Semiotics

I am sympathetic with the semiotic approach to ethnographic investigations because I agree with Clifford Geertz, who submits that the concept of culture is a “semiotic one.”⁹¹ For Geertz, “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance, he himself has spun.” He explains, “I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be, therefore, not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.”⁹² I suppose that the web of significance, which human beings have woven around themselves, is what gives them meaning about God and the nature of relationship that should exist between them and God, and between them and their environment as responsible stewards. I, then, submit that local missionaries of the emic perspectives, and the visiting missionaries of the etic perspectives, have the compelling responsibility of working together toward sharing their perspectives and identifying the strands of the web of significance that people of specific cultures who encounter Christianity already have in their cosmology. The collaboration of the emic and etic investigations will facilitate in making meaning of the symbolism of peoples, and become the starting point for cross-cultural missional interventions.

Anthropological Ontology and Models

As pointed out earlier, H. W. Turner’s definition of anthropological ontology submits that human beings in their primary nature are religious beings (*homo religious*). According to Turner, human beings as such religious persons only exist as humans insofar as they relate to the totality of the universe around them in both its secular and

⁹¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.

⁹² *ibid.*, 5

sacred aspects.⁹³ Turner further explains that there is an essential relationship in the universe between the sacred and the secular.⁹⁴ He outlines his *homo religious* proposition along the following lines:

1. Religion exists and occurs in the relationship between human beings and the divine.
2. This relationship involves an immediate encounter between the human being and the divine, from which religious knowledge and experience arise.
3. This encounter between a human being “is always mediated to the human being by and through the totality of his [or her] ‘world’ or situation in no other way.”⁹⁵
4. This third issue, Turner calls “mediated immediacy.”

H. W. Turner refers to this as the epistemological structure of religious knowledge and experience.

On modeling, Turner explains: "a model is not itself a theory, but it is another way of talking about the same facts that theory refers to."⁹⁶ According to Turner, a model is informed by the totality of its world, secular and sacred, and produces in its own way a reality that corresponds to the original experienced object. In a religious instance, a model will correspond to the knowledge of the divine experienced. This knowledge of the divine that human beings experience, however, is constructed within the limitedness of human language by representations. Turner illustrates models of such human experience of the divine in Israel seeing God as father, judge, farmer, and other anthropomorphic

⁹³ Turner, “A Model for the Structure of Religion in Relation to the Secular, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 27 (1979): 42–64.”

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 42.

⁹⁵ Turner., 42.

⁹⁶ Turner., 43.

images. It seems that no matter how vivid the representations of the human experience of the divine will be, the limitedness of human language will make the representation an imperfect one. The reality of our imperfect experience of the divine and the subsequent limited representation of such experiences seems to be what Paul affirms when he concludes:

[We] see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.⁹⁷

It seems to me that what Turner calls models, Norman Perrin refers to as symbols.

Perrin argues:

A symbol, in general, is a relatively stable and repeatable element of perceptual experience, standing for some larger meaning or set of meanings which cannot be given, or fully given, in perceptual experience itself. A symbol therefore represents something else.⁹⁸

In this work, I used symbol in an understanding, which is inclusive of both models and symbols; I used them interchangeably. A symbol is an issue (image, art piece, or symbol; or anthropomorphic representation, stories, dances, festivals, silence, songs, dressing, and other cultural realities), which represents how human beings have experienced the divine, and the knowledge of the divine that they derived from those experiences. In that understanding, symbols are deeper and relatively more accurate epistemological routes to knowing the divine for people whose world is a world where symbols make more meaning for them than religious, philosophical theories. This is because, unlike people of settings where religious, philosophical theories make far-

⁹⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:12, *The NIV Bible*, Online (Bible Gateway.com, n.d.).

⁹⁸ Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, 29.

reaching meanings, people whose worlds extensively use symbols for communicating realities for human beings tend to create religious symbols from religious experiences. Religious theories⁹⁹ are largely philosophy based, while symbols or models in H. W. Turner's proposition are a human representation of people's experiences of the divine. Therefore, religious symbols are experience-based. Turner's ideas are some of the issues that undergirded my theoretical framework.

Hermeneutics for Contextual Theology in the Anthropological Model

Karen Barber's exposition on symbolic texts¹⁰⁰ facilitates the boldness to look at the Adinkra Symbols in terms of symbolic texts of the Akan peoples. Texts require their interpretation. The search for meaning of the Adinkra Symbols also requires a search for a hermeneutical paradigm—tools for identifying the meanings of the symbols. Since history is a socially-constructed past, coupled with the reality that it is not easy to get to the exact historical meanings of the Adinkra Symbols, we have to make do with the meanings. We get as close to the original as possible to what might plausibly be the original meaning. I was able to get to those meanings by comparing both written histories and oral sources. For this search for the tools for identifying the meaning of the Adinkra Symbols, I used an approach that is a continuation from Larry W. Caldwell's proposed ethnohermeneutics. Caldwell is the chief academic officer and dean, and professor of

⁹⁹ A theory is "a proposed explanation whose status is still conjectural and subject to experimentation, in contrast to well-established propositions that are regarded as reporting matters of actual fact." (Dictionary.com, online, checked on 05/05/2017 @ 2:50 pm).

¹⁰⁰ Karin Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 200.

intercultural studies at Sioux Falls Seminary in South Dakota. He has been writing about ethnohermeneutics for at least forty years.¹⁰¹ His argument has stemmed from the realization that the two-sided model that Western exegetes have continued to require of all exegetes as the only way for doing hermeneutics is not appropriate in some contexts outside of the Western world.¹⁰² According to Caldwell, this two-sided approach, which was born out of Western philosophical epistemology,¹⁰³ requires a diachronic investigation through the historical-critical method toward identifying what a text had meant for the original recipients, and an application of the original meanings to contemporary contexts. Caldwell again submits that hermeneutical processes have gone through various epochs. According to him, the hermeneutic method, which Jesus, Paul, and the apostles used, is different from the method that the creation of the printing press in the Middle Ages introduced.¹⁰⁴ He acknowledges that even now, there is a new development with the introduction and the dominance of digital reading and availability of the Bible, and this further requires a shift in hermeneutics. According to Caldwell, hermeneutical methods will continue to change, and this makes ethnohermeneutics important.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ See his comment in a paper Larry W. Caldwell presented at the 2017 Evangelical Missiological Society at Dallas Texas on the topic: "Ethnohermeneutics and Advance Theological Studies: Towards Culturally Appropriate Methodologies for Degree Programs," September 15-17, 1.

¹⁰² Larry W., "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics: Re-Evaluating New Testament Hermeneutical Models for Intercultural Bible Interpreters Today.", 315-316

¹⁰³ Larry W., 315

¹⁰⁴ See Larry W. Caldwell, "TOWARDS THE NEW DISCIPLINE OF ETHNOHERMENEUTICS: QUESTIONING THE RELEVANCY OF WESTERN HERMENEUTICAL METHODS IN THE ASIAN CONTEXT1 Larry W. Caldwell," *Journal of Asian Mission* 1/1 (), 1999.

¹⁰⁵ Larry W., "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics: Re-Evaluating New Testament Hermeneutical Models for Intercultural Bible Interpreters Today." 316-324.

Caldwell follows the propositions of Pierce,¹⁰⁶ de Saussure,¹⁰⁷ and Levi-Straus¹⁰⁸ to argue that one way of biblical interpretation is routed through symbolism or semiotics. Caldwell summarizes the understanding of this school, which affirms semiotics as another appropriate way of interpreting the scriptures in the argument that:

knowledge across cultures is possible because humanity has a common biological make-up. Thus, Semiotics has little need for the historical-critical method. Signs in the Bible are understood today because of the commonality of humanity which spans time and space.¹⁰⁹

There is the acknowledgment, as Caldwell points out, that "the implications of semiotics present some real possibilities for ethnohermeneutics."¹¹⁰ From that understanding, I continued further that if it has implications for hermeneutics, then it has critical implications, ultimately, for doing theology. This affirmation and proposition for the use of symbols for the perpetuation and communication of the religious experiences, which the symbols carry, is what H. W. Turner describes in his epistemological structure of religious knowledge and experience.

In this work, there is a departure from the Western philosophical historical-critical two-sided approach to interpretation of the Bible, to the semiotic approach to biblical hermeneutics, and ultimately, to doing theology.¹¹¹ Even though I realized that this

¹⁰⁶ Charles Sanders Pierce, *Collected Papers* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1931).

¹⁰⁷ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, Edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye in Collaboration with Albert Riedlinger. Translated by Wade Baskin, Revised Edition (London: Peter Owen, 1974).

¹⁰⁸ Claude Levi Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963).

¹⁰⁹ Larry W., "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics: Re-Evaluating New Testament Hermeneutical Models for Intercultural Bible Interpreters Today." 318.

¹¹⁰ Larry W. 318.

¹¹¹ This approach to biblical interpretation and theology is taken up in details in the latter part of Chapter 3 of this work.

semiotic hermeneutical method is largely used (if not all the time) in Ghanaian Christian preaching and teaching, theological academies in Ghana continue to teach the Western philosophical, historical diachronic-synchronic method. The semiotic approach to biblical interpretation is not very concerned with the historical settings of the text. It only settles with the stories of the Bible as symbolism and uses their meanings for encouraging and exhorting the Christians. The semiotic hermeneutic approach is more of the "in-front-of-the-text" hermeneutical method is that allows for wide applications of biblical texts. However, Victor Turner, the great exponent of symbols agrees that symbols have condensational character in which they diffuse their emotional quality to different "types of behavior and situations apparently far removed from the original meaning of the symbol."¹¹²

Ethnohermeneutics and My Field Research

I identified and used the principles of ethnohermeneutics in my field research. I identified that the principles lend great support toward discovering the meanings of the Adinkra symbols. I proposed to refer to this paradigm for interpreting the Adinkra Symbols as Adinkra hermeneutics—a continuity from Caldwell's ethnohermeneutics. Therefore, Adinkra hermeneutics were a reference to the search for the meaning of Adinkra texts with the aim of interpreting Scripture. I proposed the following outline for doing theology with Adinkra Symbols:

1. a study of the historical narratives, which the custodians of stories about the Adinkra Symbols share. This study is important for understanding the symbols in

¹¹² Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, 29.

their original contexts. I need to raise questions like the following for getting to the supposed original meanings of the Adinkra Symbols, which I worked with.

2. why were the Adinkra Symbols created?
3. what purpose(s) did the creator of those Adinkra symbols mean for them to serve in their original contexts?

These questions facilitated the discussions I had with my informants in my field research interviews.

The other issues, which have engaged the writing of this dissertation, have been about how the meanings of Adinkra Symbols are relevant as a means of facilitating relevant theological faith-building within that Akan epistemological orientation. This approach has been like synchronizing historical and contemporary realities for dealing with present-day challenges. I was able to do this synchronization for two reasons: First, the Adinkra symbolisms as Akan epistemological orientations are still in circulation among Akans in particular, and in contemporary times, among almost all of Ghanaians. Second, through facilitations of the focus group and my hermeneutic community's interviews, in which we identified critical hermeneutical equivalences for Adinkra symbolic theological expressions, an appropriate contextualization of the Adinkra Symbols appeared as both possible and viable.

Two types of facilitators contributed to the field research for the Adinkra hermeneutic equivalences. These were known as "literate informants" and "non-literate informants." In the book, *Reading Other-Wise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading with their Local Communities*, which Gerald West edited, the contributors make the distinction between literate and non-literate readers of the Bible. This taxonomy

informed the classification of my informants into literate and non-literate informants. Like the contributors to Gerald's edited book, the literate informants included local commentators who have studied and analyzed the stories about the Adinkra Symbols, which the Akan Ancestors have preserved for contemporary times. These literate informants were people who have used the lenses of higher levels of education to evaluate those stories about the Adinkra Symbols from the ancestors. I used non-literate in a special sense like they do in Gerald's book. Non-literate does not necessarily mean that they have no formal education at all, but rather they relatively constitute the custodians of the myths and the historical traditions about the Adinkra symbolic texts. Such informants relatively do not read their own interpretations into the texts; they allow the Adinkra texts to speak for themselves. The informants at Ntonso and the paramount chief of the Suma Traditional Area (though a Ph.D. scholar) were such non-literate informants in that understanding. They wanted me to get the stories as handed down to them through the times, in order for me to draw out what I considered to be the meanings of the issues the symbols represent. They produced the raw data for me to analyze in order to draw relatively objective conclusions for the interpretations of the meaning.

In my field research, I discovered that the literate informants tended to read their own interpretation into the responses and tried to draw conclusions for me. Some of these literate informants were cultural anthropologists. However, for the need to keep the balance toward avoiding subjectivity, I decided to work with these two types of informants.

Definitions

What is Contextual Theology?

T. D. Gener, who tries to synthesize the various shades of explanations, which scholars have given to the concept contextual theology, argues, “Strictly speaking, the terms local theology, contextualization, or inculturation carry different nuances, though they are often used synonymously in mission literature.”¹¹³ According to him, contextual theology is the description of the way of doing theological reflection in which the reflection is not only rooted in the biblical story but also engages the concrete contextual or local realities in which Christians find themselves.¹¹⁴

Bevans explains the concept of contextual theology as “the attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context.”¹¹⁵ It is the way of doing theology, which places significance on human experience, which is gathered through, “cultures, history, contemporary thought forms,”¹¹⁶ as well as the metaphors, songs, stories, symbols, and dance forms that peoples have symbolized from their experiences of God in their history. Bevans makes grasping the concept of contextualization simple by pointing to two main issues that we have to consider in doing contextual theology. According to him, contextual theology takes into account two realities: experience of the past, recorded in

¹¹³ T. D. Gener, “Contextualization,” in *Global Dictionary of Theology*, Eds. William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2008), 996.

¹¹⁴ Gener., 192.

¹¹⁵ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Cultures* (New York: Orbis Books, 2012), 3.

¹¹⁶ Bevans., 4.

Scripture, which has been preserved and defended in the Church's tradition; and the experience of the present of a particular context.¹¹⁷

For Dean Flemming, contextual reflections on theology are important because they make the Christian message meaningful to people. Flemming explains that contextual theology "has to do with how the gospel revealed in Scripture authentically comes to life in each new cultural, social, religious and historical setting."¹¹⁸ According to Flemming, the employment of a people's language and categories in theological reflections in contextual theologies facilitates making sense of the Christian faith to people in their particular cultural contexts.¹¹⁹

In the writing of Robert J. Schreiter, he refers to the concept that Bevens calls "contextual theologies" as a subsidiary of a larger concept, which he refers to as "local theologies."¹²⁰ He explains that the contextual model of theology starts its theological reflections with cultural context.

In all of the definitions of contextual theologies listed above, one may observe the following significant notes. First, we may note that in contextual theological reflections, the story of the Bible does not assume container into which every theological reflection has to fit in. Second, we may also note that people's historical experiences are significant in making meaning of the Christian faith for them as a missional obligation. The

¹¹⁷ Stephan B. Bevens, "What Has Contextual Theology to Offer the Church of the Twenty-First Century," in *Contextual Theology for the Twenty-First Century*, Eds. Stephen B. Bevens and Katalina Tahaafe-Williams, 1 vols. (Eugene, Or: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 139.

¹¹⁸ Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (IVP Academic, 2009), 13-14.

¹¹⁹ Dean and Flemming., 13.

¹²⁰ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 1.2.1985 edition (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1985), 12.

incarnation of Jesus Christ seems to provide a theological paradigm for the contextual theological reflections, as Andrew Walls contends. According to Walls, the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ is the compelling issue that cries out for the need for contextual theology. He argues:

when Divinity was translated into humanity, he did not become generalized humanity. He became *a person* in a particular place and time. The translation of God into humanity, whereby the sense and meaning of God was transferred, was effected under very culture-specific conditions ... The words of the Great Commission require that the various nations are to be made disciples of Christ. In other words, national distinctives, the things that mark out each nation, the shared consciousness and shared traditions, and shared mental processes and patterns of relationships, are within the scope of discipleship. Christ can become visible within the very things which constitute nationality.¹²¹

Walls' comment and Bevans' contention that every theology has a context¹²² point to the need for a theologian to maintain theologies with cultural characteristics. Such culture-informed theologies require the search within the culture of the receiving people of that theology to find cultural categories for both analyzing and articulating the understanding of God for the people.

We can, therefore, explain contextual theology as the theologization for a people, by the people, which is informed and takes into account their cultural distinctiveness as a people from their historical experiences.¹²³ It does not, however, as Bevans argues, sacrifice the Scripture tradition of the universal Church built over the centuries in which Christians have grappled with the search for orthodox expressions of the Christian

¹²¹ Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith*, First Edition edition (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2002), 27.

¹²² Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 3.

¹²³ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Cultures*, 4.

faith.¹²⁴ It is a theological reflection, which uses the cultural texts or symbols of a people, in addition to the stories of the Bible as the basic self-disclosure of God, as a paradigm for us.¹²⁵ Walls identifies some of these cultural texts as “the shared consciousness,” “shared traditions,” “shared mental processes,” and shared “patterns of relationships.” Zahniser also calls them “dominant symbols.” For a fuller understanding of what the distinctiveness of a people is about, I see two important issues regarding the culture of the people, as well as the context of the people. A definition of these two will paint a clearer picture of what needs to inform contextual theology.

What is Culture?

Both theologians and anthropologists concede that the phenomenon that we refer to as culture is difficult to define. According to James Spradley, culture is "the acquired knowledge used to interpret experience and generate behavior."¹²⁶ For Michael Rynkiewicz, culture "is a more or less integrated system of knowledge, values, and feelings that people use to define their reality (worldview), interpret their experiences, and generate appropriate strategies for living." In addition, Rynkiewicz adds that culture is about the "system that people learn from other people around them and share with other people in a social setting." He further explains that it is "a system that people use to adapt to their spiritual, social, and physical environments." Finally, Rynkiewicz says that culture is "a system that people use to innovate in order to change themselves as their

¹²⁴ Bevens, 5.

¹²⁵ Zahniser, *Symbol and Ceremony: Making Disciples Across Cultures*, 78.

¹²⁶ James Spradley. “Culture and Ethnography” (Online: www.bethelcollege.edu/users/.../Culture%20%20and%20E...

environments change."¹²⁷ In the *Global Dictionary of Theology*, culture is defined as "the patterns, artifacts, and practices that humans develop to organize their corporate life and express their identity."¹²⁸

Commonalities can be found in all these definitions. First, they all agree that culture is a human construction. Second, they also intimate a functional definition of culture. Again, they all see culture as a phenomenon, which serves human needs of regulation and survival in specific locations. However, the *Global Dictionary of Theology* and Rynkiewicz go further to show some of these uses of culture, which serve the ethical, social, environmental, and political needs for a people. It is significant that the *Global Dictionary* places emphasis on "patterns, artifacts" as parts of a people's cultural texts. We can deduce from these sample definitions that culture is the summation of the number of issues that gives ethnicities their distinctiveness. Walls advocate that missionaries have to protect this issue of cultural distinctiveness wherever possible. Culture is a phenomenon that human beings create and transmit by various channels, including symbols, for making meaning of their lives, and for relating to deities. People use the reality of cultural distinctiveness for defining themselves, and for organizing their societies in specific settings for their survival, and for regulating themselves as a corporate society. People do not really have to sacrifice their cultural distinctiveness in the name of conversion. When people are taken out of their culture,

¹²⁷ Michael Rynkiewicz, *Soul, Self, and Society: A Postmodern Anthropology for Mission in a Postcolonial World* (Eugene, Or: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2012), 19. Emphasis mine.

¹²⁸ William A. Dyrness et al., eds., *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church* (Downers Grove, Ill. : Nottingham, England: IVP Academic, 2008), 217.

they are pushed into what Ibeawuchi Mbogu calls "anthropological pauperization."

Mbogu comments on anthropological pauperization as:

The social underdevelopment of Africa represents a fundamental aspect of the anthropological pauperization of the African person. If we define pauperization as the fact of becoming poor, namely being deprived of all that we have acquired, all that we are and all that we can be, we shall recognize that Africa is subjected to structure, which results in complete pauperization: political and social. When it is not a matter of being deprived of all we own, but rather of all we are—our human identity, our social roots, our history, our culture, our dignity, our rights, our hopes, our plans—then pauperization becomes anthropological.¹²⁹

According to Walls, mission has to have the objective of saving people with their cultures.¹³⁰ If that is the objective of mission, then the appropriate mission will have to be one that does not rip people from their culture, but rather dialogues with the culture for the purposes of doing theology with them.

What is Context?

Context, like culture, is also difficult to define. To a large extent, context finds meaning as it relates to human beings, and refers to issues like the historical experience of a people, their culture, their social location, and social changes.

Contextual theology, therefore, is a type of theology that takes the cultural symbolisms and historical experiences, and their social location and social changes as issues of God's prevenient grace. These issues have to be critically reexamined, and if possible, critically redefined, to serve as receptacles for the transmission of the Gospel to

¹²⁹ Nicholas Ibeawuchi Mbogu, *Christology and Religious Pluralism: A Review of John Hick's Theocentric Model of Christology and the Emergence of African Inculturation Christologies* (LIT Verlag, 2006), 343.

¹³⁰ Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 7.

the peoples. This, for me, is necessary for making it possible for people of different contexts to understand, to own, and to integrate the contextual theology into how they live in their social locations. From his comment, one identifies that Walls,¹³¹ is contending that a theology of mission and mission work does not have to become an issue for ripping people of their cultures.

What is Tradition?

I was going to be alluding to the concept of tradition in many instances in this dissertation. It, therefore, seemed appropriate to explain what I mean by that reference. I used tradition in the understanding, which Kwame Gyekye advances, as a "deep and fundamental conception" of the concept of tradition.¹³² Tradition, according to him, refers to the maintenance through cherishing the values, practices, outlooks, and institutions, which a previous generation bequeaths to its succeeding generations.¹³³ In this understanding, Gyekye explains that a society is "traditional inasmuch as it maintains and cherishes values, practices, outlooks, and institutions bequeathed to it by previous generations and all or much of which on normative grounds it takes pride in, boasts of, and builds on."¹³⁴ Further, Gyekye submits that all societies in the modern world inherit ancestral cultural values. Therefore, for him, modernity is not really a rejection of the

¹³¹ Walls., 7.

¹³² Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 217.

¹³³ Gyekye., 217.

¹³⁴ Gyekye., 217.

past values, practices, outlooks, and institutions. Gyekye also points out that for that reason, it is not appropriate to perceive tradition and modernity as polar opposites.¹³⁵

I agree with Gyekye that modernity is actually building on traditions of the past. However, it is also appropriate to mention that by tradition, I do not mean the intimation, which is carried by the sociological and anthropological characterizations. These two academic disciplines tend to explain the concept tradition, as Gyekye says, in terms of “rural, agrarian, prescientific, resistant to change and innovation, and bound by the perception [and reverence] of the past.”¹³⁶

Again, I want to point out that traditions by their instrumentality are meant to make people live a facilitated lifestyle within specific cultural contexts in the face of the myriad of challenges that threaten their survival, and also facilitate peaceful coexistence within the historical context. Therefore, if a people engage in an unflinching context of maintaining tradition in spite of evolving new trends and new social commitments, then tradition ceases to be facilitations and becomes issues of enslavement. With that said, traditions are not entirely uprooted in the need for the modern, and that in most cases, traditions become the structures on which people of particular cultures give flesh to the modern. Usually, traditions morph into the modern to make them relevant to changing cultural contexts. I will explain this further in Chapter 3.

Literature Review

I approached my literature review from a number of perspectives. These perspectives contributed to my identification of the Adinkra Symbols as creedal symbolic windows through which I recognized that the Akans may have had some form of

¹³⁵ Gyekye., 217.

¹³⁶ Gyekye., 217.

exposure to Christianity even before the first batch of sixteenth-century missionaries came to Ghana. From this orientation, I reviewed some works that indicate the Akan pre-missionary exposure to some form of Christianity. The literature review in this section only touched on the cardinal issues, which caused me to think through them, and which have brought me the need for this research.

Akans: Who are they?¹³⁷

The Akan speaking community in Ghana is arguably the largest ethnic group in Ghana.¹³⁸

They make up more than 80¹³⁹ percent of Ghana's population. According to Sangaparee:

Akans are the largest group in Ghana, and they are occupying 5 of the 10 administrative Regions in Ghana namely Central Region, Western Region, Eastern Region, Ashanti Region and the Brong Ahafo Region respectively. Therefore, Akan is well spoken and understood by many people in Ghana, which is becoming the Lingua Franca in Ghana.

To some extent, I agree with Sangaparee that Akans are settled in those five regions, insofar as he implies that to mean that those are their geographical and predominant demographic settlements where large numbers of Akans can be found. However, a significant presence and influence of Akans can be experienced in almost all

¹³⁷ In my MTh Thesis, I discovered the definition of who the Akans are, and that is what I am building on in this research.

¹³⁸ The referent Akans is a common description of a linguistic socio-ethnic distinctive group in Ghana. I am aware that there is an unpublished work by Juliana Senavor (Once, the Principal of Christian Service College, now Christian Service University College, in Kumasi Ghana), which seeks to challenge the hitherto popular view that Guans are linguistically Akans. But, the tide of publications and discussed evidence in support of the fact that Guans are Akans tilt heavily against Senavor's theory. For example, see Clement Sangaparee's article "who are the "Akans" (Ghanaweb, March 14, 2013). In that article, he traces the Akans to the Guans. If the Guans are Akans, then the siblings, the Efutus on the Coast of the Central Region of Ghana, are Akans too.

¹³⁹ Rutgers (School of Arts and Science. "Akan (Twi)" at Rutgers. www.amesall.rutgers.edu/languages/128-akan-twi visited on 03/21/2018 at 4:00 pm.

parts of Ghana,¹⁴⁰ and even outside the borders of Ghana into the Ivory Coast. A significant large population of Ghanaians speaks the Akan language in its various dialects—Twi, like Fante, Akyem, Akuapem, Wassa, Nzima, Bono, Kwahu, among others.¹⁴¹ According to Rutgers:

Akan comprises three main mutually intelligible dialects: Fante, Asante Twi, and Akwapim Twi. Asante Twi is the widely used. Akan is the most widely spoken and used indigenous language in Ghana. About 44%, of Ghana's population of about 22 million, speak Akan as first language. However, about 80% of Ghanaians speak Akan as a first and second language.¹⁴²

This is part of the reason why there is a call in Ghana to make Akan the national language in place of English—a call that Sangaparee's article embodies or symbolizes. A theological discussion that will benefit Akans in any purpose of its cultivation, therefore, has the potential of benefitting the majority of Ghanaians and can be said to have the potential of influencing all Ghanaians as well as sub-Saharan Africans.

In terms of their predominance, Akans are settled in the southern half of Ghana and the Ivory Coast, extending from the southeastern borders with Togo and scattered along the middle belt of Ghana into parts of the western boarders with the Ivory Coast. Historical migrations for arable lands, gold trade, peaceful settlements, and other migration-provoking reasons have subdivided them into the following groups: Asante,

¹⁴⁰ “Ethnic Groups in Ghana.” Ghanaweb. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/tribes/> visited on 03/21/2018 at 12:55 pm.

¹⁴¹ Oduro-Mensah, *Akanism, and Hebrewism: Akan-Mesopotamian Links and Earlier Civilization*, 2.

¹⁴² Rutgers (School of Arts and Science. “Akan (Twi)” at Rutgers. www.amesall.rutgers.edu/languages/128-akan-twi visited on 03/21/2018 at 4:00 pm.

Bono, Fante, Akyem, Akuapim, Kwahu, and Wassa.¹⁴³ Other Akan groups are the Awutu/Afutu and Anum-Kyerepon/Larteh, Anyi, Sewn, Nzema, and Ahanta.¹⁴⁴

Though some of the clans of Akans, like the Aduana, claim to have come out of a hole in the small reserved forest of Asantemanso near Asumegya in the Asante Region, there is ample research evidence that point to the possibility that they were either a stock of the Israelites or close neighbors of the Israelites.¹⁴⁵ The theory that says they migrated from the Israelites also argues that they migrated to become a part of the ancient Ghana Empire.¹⁴⁶ I will not be surprised if it is later discovered that the Aduana's claim of having come out of a hole in the earth is an adulteration of the biblical account of creation from the earth.¹⁴⁷ When the ancient Ghana Empire fell in 1076 AD, they migrated from Timbuktu in groups and settled in the northern territories of Ghana in the present Gonja lands around 120 AD.¹⁴⁸ They further migrated from the northern parts of Ghana and moved further south in search of arable lands for farming.¹⁴⁹

In Ghana today, there are minor variations in the groups who respond to the reference Akans, and these are reasonable ones. Such minor variations are a result of the

¹⁴³ F.K. Buah adds Adanse, Twifo, Asen, and Akwamu. See his *A History of Ghana*, revised and updated (Oxford: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1998), 8.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 8

¹⁴⁵ See J.B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God* (1944); Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, *The Divine Kingship in Ghana and Ancient Egypt* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1960), 15-17.

¹⁴⁶ Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, in *The Sacred State of the Akans* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd.), 21-23, agrees that the Akans immigrated into Ghana from the Kumbu Kingdom or one of its vassal states. The work also agrees to the relationship between the Akan peoples as they are referred to today.

¹⁴⁷ "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." (Gen. 2:7).

¹⁴⁸ See Sangaparee, "who are the "Akans" (Ghanaweb, March 14, 2013).

¹⁴⁹ Osei Kwadwo, *An Outline of Asante History*, part 1, 3rd ed., (Kumasi: CITA Press, 2004), 1.

fact that some of their subsocial groupings have been living in separate geographical areas among different ethnic groups within Ghana and have consequently had common linguistic mating in the different settings. They have also been sharing some level of cosmological perceptions with non-Akan groups.¹⁵⁰ The average Akan knows that all Akans share common ancestral origins.¹⁵¹

J. B. Danquah and Daniel Oduro-Mensah: The Akan-Jewish Connection

J. B. Danquah and Daniel Oduro-Mensah have published two significant works that contend for the Akan-Israelite relationship. I saw it relevant to review those works, too. Joseph Boakye Danquah is described as the doyen of Ghana's politics or political drive to independence. He had a doctorate in law and philosophy degree from the University of London. On his return to Ghana, he became one of the founders of United Gold Coast Convention, which formally started the demand for political independence from Britain for Ghana. It was his political organization, the United Gold Coast Convention, which invited Dr. Kwame Nkrumah from America to become the secretary. Nkrumah later broke away from the party and founded the Convention People's Party, which agitated Britain, and eventually won independence for Ghana in 1957 as the first African country south of the Sahara to win such independence. Danquah published a good number of books. His classic, *The Akan Doctrine of God* (1944), and Daniel Oduro-

¹⁵⁰ For further reading on Akans see (1) J.D.K. Ekem, "Akan Study Bible Material On 1 Corinthians 11:2-16" in Jean-Claud Loba-Mkole and Ernest R. Wendland eds., *Interacting with Scriptures in Africa* (Nairobi: Action Publishers, 2005), 102 – 122. (2) Daniel Oduro-Mensah, *Akanism, and Hebrewism: Akan-Mesopotamian Links and Earlier Civilization* (Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 2007), 2-3.

¹⁵¹ See F.K. Buah, *A History of Ghana*, revised and updated (Oxford: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1998), 8., for a discussion of the common grounds the Akans share as people from the same origin.

Mensah's *Akanism and Hebrewism: Akan-Mesopotamian Links and Earlier Civilization*, are publications that take the Akan relationship with God seriously. Danquah's work does not only use the Adinkra Symbols to elucidate the doctrine of God as Akans articulate it. For all purposes and intents, Danquah's attributes of the Akan God are similar to the biblical attributes of God. Danquah also contends with Oduro-Mensah that the Akan name for God, "Nyame," is the same as the name "Yahweh" for God among the Israelites.¹⁵² For Oduro-Mensah, even the names of days of the week in Akan are reflective of the creation narratives of Genesis 1.¹⁵³ A noted difference between the two publications is that Oduro-Mensah seems to take the issues too far by contending that the Israelites might have taken their knowledge of God from the Akans. He contends:

The great Supreme Being, the conception of whom has been innate in the minds of Ashanti, is the Jehovah of the Israelites. The Asantes, and for that matter Akans, most probably knew Ya (Jehovah) long before He revealed Himself to the Israelites or Abraham.¹⁵⁴

Though Oduro-Mensah's contention sounds like too much of a stretch. It is built from the magnitude of evidence that the two publications catalog in support of the similarities in religious referencing and symbolic texts, which exists between Akans and Israelites. Interestingly, this Akan-Israelite link has been pointed out, though not with such details, in a publication by R. S. Rattray much earlier.¹⁵⁵ It must be mentioned here that Danquah's work is deeply rooted in extensive research, and that he is not just making assumptions.

¹⁵² J.B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, 1944, 30-34.

¹⁵³ Oduro-Mensah, *Akanism, and Hebrewism: Akan-Mesopotamian Links and Earlier Civilization*, 18-21.

¹⁵⁴ Rattray, cited in Oduro-Mensah, 3.

¹⁵⁵ R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1923), 3.

Scope and Delimitations

My research seeks to contribute to Africa's search for appropriate contextualization; however, Africa is made up many ethnic groups, and again, the continent is also too vast of a geo-ethnic area to allow for a sampling of symbols from every corner. Therefore, I chose to delimit my research to some of the e they are spread around Ghana. I believe that the representation of the Akans for the African search will serve as a prototype paradigm for doing a contextualization symbolism in all the ethnic groupings of Africa, especially those of black Africa.

Conclusion

In this chapter 1, I discussed the background, scope, and the Methodology of this dissertation. I explained the theoretical framework for the dissertation—Semiotic Anthropological Ontology, and how I will be using it for the dissertation. I explained that this theoretical framework is appropriate for this dissertation. I indicated that the dissertation was going to be largely informed by both ethnographic interviews and the use of literature. A noteworthy proposal, which I mentioned in this chapter, is the use of ethnohermeneutics, and not so much of the two-sided (diachronic-synchronic) historical critical method for doing symbolic theology. I mentioned that to be able to do the ethnohermeneutic with symbols, we need to know the stories or myths behind the symbols. In chapter 2, I will be discussing the theories that have been proposed about the origins of the Adinkra Symbols. I consider that as important for the attempt toward identifying the meanings of some of the Adinkra Symbols.

Chapter 2

Origins of the Adinkra Symbols: Reshaping and Drawing from the History



Figure 7
Obi nka obi

In this chapter, I will argue for what I referred to as the Nana Adinkra of the Gyamans origin of the Adinkra Symbols because of the data I have gathered from my field research. This theory, which appears more plausible, says that a Nana Adinkra of the Gyamans in either the Bono Ahafo Region of Ghana or the Côte d'Ivoire created the Adinkra Symbols.¹⁵⁶ However, even though I support the theory that the Nana Adinkra created the Adinkra Symbols, a reason for which the Symbols bear his name, I will show that I am not, in the least, concluding that the Nana Adinkra of the Gyamans created all the Adinkra Symbols.

I have realized that the issues, which climaxed in the creation of some of the Adinkra Symbols, showed that they were largely created as expressions of the religious experiences for the Ancestors of the Akans. These Adinkra Symbols fall within H. W. Turner's theory, which I mentioned in chapter 1 as one of the pillars on which I constructed my theoretical framework—semiotic anthropological ontology. I want to

¹⁵⁶ It is interesting that in my field research, many informants attributed the creation and origins of the Adinkra Symbols to Nana Adinkra (I later came to know his full name as Nana Kwadwo Adinkra Agyeman) of the Gyamans. However, while some of them said the Gyamans are in the Côte d'Ivoire; others informed me that they are in the Bono Ahafo Region of Ghana. I will explain this confusion later in the chapter.

refer to such Adinkra Symbols that the Akan Ancestors created for religious expressions as religious Adinkra Symbols. To further situate the discussions of my research within my theoretical framework, I led the discussion to raise the following issues:

1. that the religious Adinkra Symbols were meant to invite the succeeding generations of the Akan people into the religious experiences of their Ancestors; and
2. that the religious faith symbolisms, which were carried in the Adinkra Symbols, were meant to be carried over and facilitate the making of those faith expressions become the faith symbols of the succeeding generations of the Akan people.

For instance, during my field interview at the Center for National Culture in Kumasi, the research officer made a comment that was as interesting as compelling. According to him, “Akan had some knowledge of God before Christian missionaries came to Ghana and that the Adinkra Symbols are a proof of this knowledge of God.” James Nkansah-Obrempong also strongly argues for this Akan pre-missionary-knowledge-of-God proposition.¹⁵⁷ The information that the Akan people had a pre-Christian missionary knowledge of God became part of the issues that strengthened my need to search for both the context within, which the Adinkra Symbols were created, and also search for their use in their original contexts.

I agree with Nkansah-Obrempong that the attempt to rediscover the origins of the Adinkra Symbols is not easy. Nkansah-Obrempong has pointed out that the attempt at

¹⁵⁷ James Nkansah-Obrempong, *Visual Theology: Some Akan Cultural Symbols, Metaphors, Proverbs, Myths, and Symbols and Their Implications for Doing Christian Theology* (VDM Verlag Dr. Muller, 2010), 75-79, 170-182.

rediscovering the origins of the Adinkra Symbols has engaged the minds of Ghanaian scholars for some time now.¹⁵⁸ Many theories about the origins of the Symbols have been proposed. I reviewed three of such theories in this chapter.

In cases like studies in oral cultures, the researcher gets limited to only analytically and synoptically search for information from the myths¹⁵⁹ or historical traditions (i.e., stories or narratives), which the custodians (the people who have been entrusted with keeping and transmission of those myths or the said-historical traditions) have kept. Such custodians become the people who guard and preserve those myths, albeit, with, as Sarpong points out, some unavoidable peripheral transmission alterations.¹⁶⁰

Akans and the Custody Historical Myths/Traditions

Among the Akan people, these custodians of a people's sacred myths know that such historical traditions are extremely important for preserving and guarding the identity of ensuing generations of the people of their lineages and ethnicities. Custodians, therefore, keep them with all carefulness and skillfulness to be able to pass them on to succeeding generations. Sometimes, kings and paramount chiefs judge on the rightful ownership of family properties and the succession to stools (i.e., deciding who is

¹⁵⁸ This issue is part of the primary submissions of the following writers on that subject: Nkansah-Obrempong. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion*.

¹⁵⁹ I use "myth" here in reference to sacred stories which are told about religious symbols. This use of "myth" does not imply that the stories are false. They are stories told to keep alive the truth of religious issues or sacred symbols from one generation to another. As I explained in the main "Introduction" to this research, myths are stories that tell truths, which are more discerned than scientifically proven.

¹⁶⁰ Peter Sarpong, "Preface" in Nana Otamakuro Adubofour, *Asante: The Making of a Nation* (Nana Otamakora Adubofour, 2000), iii.

qualified to become the next chief) at the traditional courts on the articulations of such historical accounts.

Therefore, in oral cultures like that of the Akans, these myths or historical traditions usually become the research material to be studied for information regarding the origins of a people and other related issues about them. Again, in some of the cases, these historical traditions require laborious traversing and the comparison of such historical narratives with secondary sources (written and unwritten, and symbolic and metaphorical) before a researcher can form an informed story for submission. This is where the analytical and synoptic reading or investigation of those historical traditions (i.e., oral texts) and written texts become crucial.

Tracing the Origins of the Adinkra Symbols

The route to substantiating the Nana Adinkra/Gyamans' theory of the origins of the Adinkra Symbols requires the study of such oral sources by way of history as well as the stories behind the origins of the Adinkra Symbols. The study for the origins of the Adinkra Symbols attempted to synchronize long historical narratives; however, without the analysis of such historical narratives, it would be difficult to explain the historical context within which the first Adinkra Symbols were created. Again. It would also be extremely difficult to identify the purpose(s) those Symbols were meant to serve with the historical narratives. The search for the histories and stories behind the Adinkra Symbols becomes especially so if a researcher is searching for the meaning of the Adinkra Symbols to be able to apply them to meanings that will edify contemporary contexts like what I have sought to do. The difficulty in trying to get hermeneutical imports from the Adinkra Symbols is because people have not looked at the Adinkra Symbols as

ethnohermeneutical texts or tools. They have only sought answers to interpretations via the historical-critical method, which contemporary exegetes require everybody to use. If we identify Africa's symbolic epistemological orientations and begin to employ symbols like art pieces, songs, dance forms, institutions, and the stories behind those institutions, we could identify that symbolisms offer an easier route toward making deeper meanings of the Christian faith for the "homo africanus."

For that purpose of getting to know the need to study the stories behind the Symbols (especially the religious Symbols), philosophical historical-critical methods are not very helpful. What is important, as I observed in my field interviews, is the need to know the contexts in which the Symbols were created. In those ways, I got relatively closer to the actual meanings the creators of the Symbols, and the first recipients of the Symbols assigned them (the Symbols).

The enterprise, with regard to searching for the meaning of the Adinkra Symbols, is possible because there are surviving descendants of the creators of some of the Adinkra Symbols who are custodians of the myths or stories behind the Adinkra Symbols. Therefore, in the case of the Adinkra Symbols, the data I gathered from my ethnographic field research largely informed this chapter. At the end of the discussions, I drew some implications from the data supporting the Gyamans' origins of the Adinkra Symbols. However, I saw it necessary to explain why a support for the Nana Adinkra/Gyamans origin of the Adinkra Symbols is plausible.

Why Support the Nana Adinkra/Gyamans Origin?

I am supporting the Nana Adinkra/Gyamans theory of the historical origins of the Adinkra Symbols for many reasons. First, I interviewed the paramount chief of the Suma

Traditional Area in Ghana who is a direct descendant of the Nana Adinkra. As such a descendent, he became for me an important survivor together with the people who are purported to be the custodians¹⁶¹ of the traditions about the Adinkra Symbols.¹⁶² These custodian(s) of the traditions of the Adinkra Symbols are represented in Odeneho Dr. Afram Brempong III, the paramount chief of the Suma Traditional Area in Ghana¹⁶³ (referred to in this paper as the *Sumamanhene*). Historical traditions from a source like the *Sumamanhene* becomes very important in the research like mine, especially, if they have put their submissions in the public domain, and no significant person(s) have

¹⁶¹ I use “custodian(s)” to mean the family members who see the history of their ancestral lines as necessary for both their survival and inheritance of family properties, and also for ascension to royal stools of their people/families. Such people are made to learn and keep their histories, and that of their significant Ancestors in their family histories with seriousness and carefulness. Such histories are their rightful claims to royal stools. The same historical accounts separate them from people who became members of the family as acquired slaves. In those years when chiefs and rich people could acquire slaves, it was the case among Akans that those slaves and their descendants, when they have lived with their lords for a long time, transition into free members of the family. In that sense, nobody remains a slave forever among Akans. The proverb: “if a slave remains in the family for a long time, she or he becomes a family member” attests to that custom. Such slaves get full rights as members of their acquired families. However, because Akans do inheritance “by the blood of mothers” (i.e. matrilineal inheritance), such freed slaves who become full members of the family are not allowed to ascend royal stools (i.e. become chiefs or kings). To ensure that only true matrilineal members of the family ascend the royal stools, they are the only once who are told and taught the techniques about how to keep such significant family histories. When an Asante chief or king says to litigating rivals to a stool: “okay if you claim you have the right to sit/ascend a stool come and sing “ana,” that is what the chief or king is asking them to prove. They want the rivals to tell their ancestral history by recounting their ancestral relatives who have sat on the stool in the past through their immediate mothers and maternal uncles. A custodian of tradition/history among Akans is, therefore, is not like custodians in some other parts of the world; Akan custodians are traditionally trained (often by apprenticeship) like Jews, to learn by rote, and be able to tell the histories of their ancestor. Such custodians are, therefore, extremely important sources of Akan histories. As a royal myself, I was made to live with my great maternal granduncle for that same purpose.

¹⁶² Emmanuel Adu Gyamerah, Daily Graphic, March 16, 2016.

¹⁶³ Odeneho Dr. Afram Brempong III told me this in my first interview with him in June 2016. Emmanuel Adu Gyamerah also wrote same information in the national newspaper, Daily Graphic, March 16, 2016

challenged what they contend for. I began my search for the origins of the Adinkra Symbols by outlining some of the theories of the origins of the Adinkra Symbols.

Earlier Scholarly Theories of Origin of the Adinkra Symbols

I sampled some the theories of the origins of the Adinkra Symbols that Joseph Boakye Danquah, Kwame Boateng, and James Nkansah-Obrempong have submitted.

J. B. Danquah's Theory

Joseph Boakye Danquah (to be referred to as Danquah from here) was one of the first native scholars who formally attempted to trace the origins of the Adinkra Symbols. His relevant work¹⁶⁴ is also among the first works that attempted to propose that the Adinkra Symbols could reveal the Akan knowledge of God. Danquah argues in that classic work that the Adinkra symbols are called *Adinkra* because the symbols are printed in cloths that are worn during funerals among Akans. In his explanation, *Adinkra* is therefore from the Akan “di nkra,” which he says, “means to part, be separated, to leave one another, to say goodbye.”¹⁶⁵ Danquah explains that in the Akan language, “‘nkra’” or “‘nkara’ ... means a message of intelligence, which each soul takes with him from God upon his obtaining leave to depart to the earth.”¹⁶⁶ In explaining it that way, Danquah was rightly using the Akan understanding of human life as originating from God. He explained that before each human soul (or “*okra* or *okara*), which he says is the *nous*,

¹⁶⁴ Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion*, xix-xx.

¹⁶⁵ Danquah., xix. See Adolph Hilary Agbo, *Values of Adinkra Symbols* (Kumasi: Delta Design and Publications, 2011), x.

¹⁶⁶ Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion.*, xix.

takes leave of God to come into the world, he says a goodbye to God.¹⁶⁷ Danquah was thus sharing in the Akan belief in *nkrabea* and *hyebre* (properly written in Akan as *hyɛbrɛ/hyɛbea*). Akans believe that in this bidding of the goodbye to God when human beings are coming to the world of the living through birth, the *okra* tells God what he or she is coming to do in the world. The *okra* also tells God about how she or he would die from the world and come back to *asamando*.¹⁶⁸ The Akan highlife song, “Yaa Amanua,” explains this worldview of prospective babies bidding goodbye to Nyame and taking destinies from him before their birth.¹⁶⁹

According to Danquah, *Adinkra* has been coined from “‘A’ Di nkra,” meaning a person had bidden a destiny farewell to God and is expecting it to be surely fulfilled in his or her life so long as they live.¹⁷⁰ He further argued that this is the reason why the

¹⁶⁷ Danquah, xix.

¹⁶⁸ “Asamando” is the Akan referent for the world of the death.

¹⁶⁹ Nana Kwame Ampadu, *Yaa Amanua*, Nana Kwame Ampadu (n.d.). Ampadu, Nana Kwame Ampadu. The Akan ace musician, Nana Kwame Ampadu has sang a story of a woman, Yaa Amanua, who was not having any child for her husband. Among the Akans such childlessness is not expected. In the period when Nana Ampadu sang the song, childlessness was a taboo and a curse. Yaa Amanua is said to have nagged all the time about God’s wickedness to her, which had made her barren. One day, God took him into the spiritual world where children yet to be born were bidding such “nkra” to God. Such “nkra” bidden to God explains how that child is going to be born, to which family, what he/she is going to be doing in life on earth, as well as how and when he/she is going to die. This becomes their “nkrabea” (i.e. the nature of their destiny on earth). When unborn children bid God such “nkra,” God also gives them a mission to carry out in the world for Him. This service to God in the physical world, the Akans call “Hyɛbrɛ” or “Hyɛbea” (i.e. the nature of God’s appointed mission on an individual soul’s life on earth). The song says that the child was coming to be born of Yaa Amanua came to bid God the “nkra,” and Yaa Amanua heard everything, including the death attempts he will make on earth. Yaa Amanua therefore, was able to prevent all those deaths so the boy lived into a very ripe age and became very wealthy. He was able to give his parents the expected respected funeral, which every Akan prays for. See Nana Ampadu, *Yaa Amanua*, Nana Kwame Ampadu.

¹⁷⁰ Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion*, xix.

Adinkra Symbols are found in funeral cloths. Thus, Danquah intimated that the people wearing the Adinkra cloth during funerals are affirming that although they do not understand the cause of the death, they believe that was how the deceased had told God he or she would die and come back to *asamando*.¹⁷¹ For Danquah, this is a way of consolation for the mourners. Akans believe that human life is a cyclical journey between life in *asamando*¹⁷² and life in *ewiase*¹⁷³ or *asaase yi so*.¹⁷⁴

However, the use to which Akans put the Adinkra Symbols, both in the past and in contemporary times, forces the ethnographic researcher to question whether Danquah's theory of origin is really the whole issue there is to it. It is significant for us to note that Danquah himself concedes that he knew very little of the motifs of Akan art to be able to say much about the subject.¹⁷⁵ I identified that Danquah is not very sure of his theory, because after that speculation, he also puts into the discussion, Rattray's theory about the origin of Adinkra Symbols, to the effect that Akans might have only borrowed the Symbols from Muslims from the north.¹⁷⁶

It seems to me that Danquah's theory to the effect that the referent *Adinkra* comes from the Akan phrase, "di nkra," which is from cloth, and reminds Akans about the farewell message a dead person had bid God, is only limiting the understanding of the origins of the Symbols to some aspects of issues in the Akan cosmology. It looks like

¹⁷¹ "Asamando" is the Akan referent to the world where dead people go to after their lives on earth.

¹⁷² Peter K. Sarpong, *Odd Customs: Stereotypes and Prejudices* (Ghana, Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2013), 65.

¹⁷³ "Ewiase" literally means under the firmament/sky.

¹⁷⁴ "Ewiase" is the space in creation where the human physical life is lived out in accordance with the farewell message a person bid God.

¹⁷⁵ Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion*, xx.

¹⁷⁶ Danquah., xx.

more of a circumstantial interpretation for the origins of the Symbols. Danquah might have seen the Symbols in traditional funeral cloths all the time, and in the maze of finding the origins of the concept, he might have settled with interpreting the word *Adinkra* descriptively. Danquah limited the significance of the Adinkra Symbols in the cultural space of the Akans when he did that theory for the origin of the Adinkra Symbols. This is because funerals are not the only spaces in which the Akans wear clothes or dresses with the Adinkra Symbols in them. The Akan people wear Adinkra cloths during festivals, religious celebrations, marriages, ordinary social settings, and even as a rhetoric for casting insinuations of insult.¹⁷⁷ In fact, the Akan people wear Adinkra Symbols as their cultural identities and religious expressions.

The Kwame Boateng Theory

A man at Ntonso¹⁷⁸ gave me a small booklet on Adinkra Symbols. The booklet is written in the Asante Twi language. It does not even have a detailed bibliography.¹⁷⁹ The donor told me that the author wrote the book for teaching the history of the Adinkra Symbols in primary schools in Ghana. In that booklet, the author, Kwame Boateng, proposed another theory. Boateng's theory supports a Nana Adinkra/Gyaman origin of the Adinkra Symbols. According to Boateng, in the ancient days, a man from Ntonso in Asante who was called Nana Kwaku Nsiah migrated to live among the Gyamans in the Côte d'Ivoire for a long time. Boateng wrote that the Nsiah learned the trade in making Adinkra cloths during his sojourn among the Gyamans. Boateng further informed that by

¹⁷⁷ See Wliis, 42.

¹⁷⁸ Ntonso is a small town on the Kumasi-Mampong road. It is in the Asante region of Ghana. The town is noted for imprinting Adinkra Symbols in cloths. I did part of my research in this town between 01/08/2015 to 04/29/2015.

¹⁷⁹ The only information for tracing the book was a cell phone number 0246892345 (or +233246892345).

that time, the Gyamans were well versed in the production of Adinkra Symbols for making cloths. According to Boateng, when Nsiah returned to Asante, he decided to produce Adinkra cloths for a living, but it was extremely difficult for him to get the barks of the *badeε* tree, which is used for the dye for Adinkra Symbol imprints in the Adinkra cloths.

The *badeε* dye as a raw material for the production of the Adinkra cloths has been supported in the writing of Agbo.¹⁸⁰ The Kwame Boateng theory says that Nsiah's search for the bark of the *badeε* tree took him to the northern parts of today's Ghana where he got the *badeε* tree bark.¹⁸¹ Until today, according to the Kwame Boateng theory, that raw material, which is boiled for about three days to get the black liquid substance for stamping the Adinkra Symbols on cloths, can only be found in the northern parts of Ghana. I do not know when the booklet was published; however, in Ntonso, I was told that though people still use the *badeε* bark substance, now people mostly use chemical dyes that they buy from shops in Kumasi for stamping the Adinkra Symbols in cloths.

The main exception with Boateng's Nsiah theory is that apart from some of the local people at Ntonso, scholars whom I have read¹⁸² so far do not mention it. It was even surprising that the informants I interviewed did not mention that; however, their

¹⁸⁰ Agbo, *Values of Adinkra Symbols*. See also Willis, 31.

¹⁸¹ The issue that the bark of the "badeε" tree is found in the northern parts (Savana areas) of Ghana is also mentioned in Willis's work. See Willis, 31.

¹⁸² Jasmine Danzy, "Adinkra Symbols: An Ideographic Writing System" (Stone Brook University, Graduate School, 2009), Stone Brook University Library. In this work, Danzy lists a good number of theories of the origins of the Adinkra Symbols. Even though Danzy's list includes the theory, which says Gyaman created the Adinkra Symbols, in that work, he does not uphold the Gyaman theory strongly. His work gave me the primary lead to some of the works I have to look at.

negligence to mention it seems reasonable. These informants were not highly educated, so written sources might not have been their sources of getting information. The Kwame Boateng theory is however, another example that advances the Gyamans' origin of the Adinkra Symbols.

James Nkansah-Obrempong's Theory

James Nkansah-Obrempong has also written a theory in support of the Nana Adinkra/Gyaman origin of the Adinkra Symbols. His work navigated other theories in circulation in his relevant literature and settled on a few of them, which have survived until contemporary times. Nkansah-Obrempong does not set out to discuss a detailed account of the surviving theories of the origins of the Adinkra Symbols. His whole discussion on the origin of the Adinkra Symbols is only about one page. However, this is reasonable because his work was written to cover many issues that he considered could be used for theology among Akans. For those purposes, Nkansah-Obrempong discussed a wide range of issues like cultural symbols, metaphors, proverbs, myths, and symbols and their implications for theological construction.¹⁸³ It is probable that because of the wide range of issues, which his work covered, he was limited with the extent to which he could go with telling the theories of the origin of the Adinkra Symbols.

I brought up the theory Nkansah-Obrempong points to in my discussion of the origin of the Symbols, first, because it affirmed the main contemporary propositions of the origin of the Symbols; and second, because it takes seriously the Adinkra/Gyaman origin into account. The third and most important reason for looking at the theory Nkansah-Obrempong supports is that in my field interviews, almost all the informants

¹⁸³ This is the general purpose of Nkansah-Obrempong, *Visual Theology*.

attributed the creation and publication of the Adinkra Symbols to the Gyamans and their king, Nana Adinkra.¹⁸⁴

Nkansah-Obrempong's theory says that the Asantes got the Adinkra Symbols from the Gyamans,¹⁸⁵ and that it was the Gyaman king, Nana Adinkra, who created the Symbols. According to Nkansah-Obrempong, this is a popular account.¹⁸⁶ He, like all the writers who discuss the Gyaman origin of the Adinkra Symbols, explains that the Gyaman king, Nana Adinkra, provoked the king of the Asantes (Asantehene), Nana Osei Bonsu Panyin, by making a copy of Asantehene's Golden Stool.¹⁸⁷ Again, like all my other informants, Nkansah-Obrempong says that the duplication of the Asantehene's golden stool resulted in a war in which the Asantes defeated the Gyamans, beheaded Nana Adinkra, and took some of his soldiers captive. He (Nkansah-Obrempong) further explains that it was some of the captured Gyaman soldiers, who were craftsmen, who introduced the Adinkra Symbols to the Asantes. He concluded that after the introduction of the Symbols to the Asantes, the Asantes started stamping the Adinkra Symbols in cloths.

¹⁸⁴ The Research Officer at the Center for National Culture, Kumasi, Archbishop Emeritus Peter Akwasi Sarpong, etc., all attributed the origin of the Adinkra Symbols to the Gyamans. The only issue, which they did not seem to agree on was where the Gyamans are located in contemporary times. Some of them said the Gyamans are in Ghana, while some of them said they are in the Côte d'Ivoire. I will explain this apparent contradiction about the geographical location of the Gyamans later in this chapter.

¹⁸⁵ There was a school that had strong support for an Asante origin of the Adinkra Symbols. Maybe, this was because of the extensive use the Asantes have and continue to put the Symbols to. The Adinkra Symbols can be seen almost every where, and on everything among the Asantes. These include: on traditional and contemporary buildings, in cloths, on swords on walkways, etc. However, I guess this is because the Asantes arguably, have a more elaborate kinship and traditional systems, as compared to the other Akans

¹⁸⁶ Nkansah-Obrempong, *Visual Theology*, 200.

¹⁸⁷ See Nkansah-Obrempong, *Visual Theology*, 200-201. Part of the information is in his footnote about the Golden Stool.

However, an elder who is closely related to the Manhyia Palace told a son of a late Antoahene, Nana Osei Kofi, the succession history of the Asante kings. The history that Nana Osei Kofi told me is similar to the list of Asante kings, which the Manhyia Palace published.¹⁸⁸ This Manhyia list of Asante kings shows that the mention of Nana Osei Bonsu as the Asante king who fought Nana Adinkra's Gyamans and brought the Adinkra Symbols to the Asantes may not be historically right. According to that published list of Asante kings, although there was an Asante king who used the stool name Osei Bonsu, the period of his reign, as compared to the period of the first Asante-Gyaman wars (1874–1883), makes citing him as the king who went to the first war with the Gyamans a date issue. The first of the Asante-Gyaman wars had already been fought much earlier in the seventeenth century before Nana Osei Bonsu ascended the Asante Golden Stool. It is possible that Nkansah Obrempong was following Rattray's submission that the Asantehene who fought and killed the Gyaman king, Nana Adinkra, was Bonsu-Panyin.¹⁸⁹ However, even in that case, the Bonsu *Panini* (that is how an Asante would write what Rattray writes as *Panyin*. *Panyin* is the Fante rendering of that adjective. It must be noted that Fantes and Asantes are all Akans, as I explained in chapter 1) would not refer to Otumfoɔ Mensah Bonsu, but Otumfoɔ Osei Tutu Kwame Asibey Bonsu, who was also called Osei Tutu Mensah Bonsu (1804–1824).¹⁹⁰ I will later lead the discussion to suggest that it must have been Otumfoɔ Osei Tutu I, Opemsoɔ, who

¹⁸⁸ Osei Kofi, The List of Asante Kings, February 17, 2016. On the home-calling of the Queen of the Asante Nation in the latter part of 2016 however, the Manhyia Palace published the list of Asante monarch, which was the same as the one my informants gave me. See http://static.omgvoice.com/images/2016/03/14072946/2000px-Ashanti_Empire_Flag.svg.png.

¹⁸⁹ Robert. S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, 264.

¹⁹⁰ See http://static.omgvoice.com/images/2016/03/14072946/2000px-Ashanti_Empire_Flag.svg.png.

fought the first of the Asante-Gyaman wars as the king of the Asantes. The history of Otumfoɔ Osei Tutu 1 as the king of the first Asante-Gyaman war synchronized with the oral tradition that I was told in my interview with the paramount chief of the Suma Traditional Area.¹⁹¹

Nkansah-Obrempong's work, however, proposed an Adinkra theological paradigm or prototype. At the end of his work, he proved this by the use of some of the Symbols to illustrate the Akan knowledge of God. His conclusion about the Akan knowledge of God appears in paradigm to be similar to what Danquah published in 1944.¹⁹² Nkansah-Obrempong also echoes Rattray's theory, which suggests that the Akans borrowed the Adinkra symbolizations from Mohammedans from north of Ghana.¹⁹³

I noted the theory that says that the Mohammedans from the north introduced the Adinkra Symbols to the Akans in other writings.¹⁹⁴ The writers who subscribe to that theory have taken that theory from Rattray's theory that the Akans only borrowed the Adinkra patterns—symbols from the Mohammedans from the North.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Nana Kusi Buachi alias Odeneho Dr. Afram Brempong III, *History of the Adinkra Symbols*.

¹⁹² Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion*, 1.

¹⁹³ Robert. S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, 264.

¹⁹⁴ Danzy, "Adinkra Symbols: An Ideographic Writing System." 11-12. See other works like the following for the same Mohammedans theory: George F. Kojo Arthur, *Cloth as a metaphor: (re)reading the Adinkra cloth Symbols of the Akan of Ghana* (Legon, Accra: Centre for Indigenous Knowledge Systems, 2001), 23; W. Bruce Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary: A Visual Primer on the Language of Adinkra* (Washington, D.C: Pyramid Complex, 1998), 31, and Daniel Mato, *Clothed in symbol: the art of Adinkra among the Akan of Ghana* (Indiana: Indiana University, 1986), 64-68.

¹⁹⁵ Rattray, *Religion, and Art in Asante* (London: Clarendon Press, 1927), 265. Also cited in Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, xx.

These Rattray-informed theorists may not have discovered the deeper Akan links with Muslims/Mohammedans from the northern parts of the territories, which Akans occupy in Ghana now. If Rattray and the writers had access to the relatively deeper Akan-Mesopotamian links—the subsequent migrations of the Akan to lands further south, and also the maps of the migrations of the Akans to their present locations in Ghana—they would have identified their ancient links with Muslims (or Mohammedans) from the north. It is very probable that they would have realized that the people they call Mohammedans from the north could actually have been brethren of the Akans who migrated later to the forest regions further south into West Africa in search of arable lands for pasture and farming, and also for their security and survival.¹⁹⁶

However, it is interesting to note that Rattray does not give the reason(s) for his conclusion that the Akans borrowed the Adinkra Symbols from Mohammedans from the north. He does not even tell us the origins of these Mohammedans he credits with the origins of the Adinkra Symbols. He only says, “I cannot help thinking that all are possibly amulet signs or symbols introduced by the north.”¹⁹⁷

In contemporary literature, there is a strong refutation of the exclusive Mohammedan-from-the-north theory. Willis, for instance, argues that it is not possible

¹⁹⁶ Oduro-Mensah, *Akanism and Hebrewism: Akan-Mesopotamian Links and Earlier Civilization*, 4, 46. See also Chapter One, Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, *The Sacred State of the Akan* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 1951), 21-26, K. Nkansa Kyeremateng, *The Akans of Ghana: Their Customs, History and Institutions* (Kwahu Bepong, Ghana: Sebewie Publishers, 2008), 19-25, and Nana Otamakuro Adubofour, *Asante: The Making of a Nation* (Kumasi, Ghana: Nana Otamakuro Adubofour, 2000), 1-2.

¹⁹⁷ Robert. S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashant*, 265i.

for all of the Adinkra Symbols to have originated from the Akan-Mohammedan encounters. According to Willis, "Many of the symbols are alien to Islamic tradition."¹⁹⁸

In any case, Nana Osei Kwadwo, when he was the curator of the Manhyia Palace Museum in Kumasi,¹⁹⁹ showed me articles and ornaments that indicate that the Asantes have had an ancient standing relationship with Muslim traders from the north.²⁰⁰

It seems to me that Rattray's submission that the Akans did nothing about the creation of the symbols, but "merely borrowed these patterns [from Mohammedans from the North], then they probably gave to each, a name and a meaning, which they invented to suit themselves,"²⁰¹ seems to have questioned the artistic abilities of the Akan people. Perhaps Rattray himself was also influenced by the anthropological presuppositions, which placed Akans and other black people at the base of the ladder of human intelligence and development. One cannot blame him because if that is what influenced him, which is very likely, then he was only behaving as the child of his age in human philosophical predispositions and undergirdings.

These seemingly obvious presumptions about Akans as a people who could not have created the Adinkra Symbols finds support in the writing of Hiebert, Tienou, and Shaw. Hiebert, Tienou, and Shaw explain that the Western missionaries (and I did not find any reason for not including Western anthropologists of that period) to other parts of the world were influenced by colonialism, the Enlightenment, and the theory of evolution. Hiebert, Tienou, and Shaw further point out that many of the missionaries,

¹⁹⁸ Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary*, 31.

¹⁹⁹ The Manhyia museum is the museum of the king of the Asantes at the Manhyia Palace, Kumasi.

²⁰⁰ Osei Kwadwo, Interview at Manhyia Museum, April 21, 2006.

²⁰¹ Robert. S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, 265.

owing to their belief in progress, assumed the superiority of Western cultures/civilization.²⁰² Perhaps the reason why Rattray does not outline any reasons for attributing the origins of the Adinkra Symbols to Mohammedans from the north can be placed within the context of a disposition not to insult his informants directly. However, writers on the origins of the Adinkra Symbols continue to use Rattray's theory.

Research Among the Gyamans/Sumas was Inevitable

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, all my informants attributed the origin of the Adinkra Symbols to the patriarch king of the Gyamans, Nana Adinkra. I later came to know his full name as Nana Kwadwo Adinkra Agyeman. I realized that to get relatively closer to an informed knowledge about the origin of the Adinkra Symbols, a research among the Gyamans was going to be extremely important. Again, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the *Sumamanhene*,²⁰³ a reported custodian of the historical traditions of the Adinkra Symbols started telling the history of the Adinkra Symbols as handed down to him from his Ancestors. I concluded that he would be a good source to interview and interact with.

This *Sumamanhene* is a direct great-great-grandnephew of Nana Kwadwo Adinkra Agyeman. As such, he is one of the two persons (if not three) who are custodians of the history and stories of the Adinkra Symbols. One of the custodians is the contemporary king of the Gyamans who is in the Côte d'Ivoire. Another is the paramount chief of the Dormaa Traditional Area in Ghana.

²⁰² Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion*. 15-20.

²⁰³ He is an American trained Ph.D. scholar himself.



Figure 8

Map of Ghana, showing the Bono (written as Brong) Ahafo areas in yellow. The Gyamans (now written as Jaman) and Dormaas occupy the areas northwest along the Côte d'Ivoire border with Ghana. Their brothers and sisters are across the border into modern day Côte d'Ivoire.

Locating the Theories: Who are the Suma People?

The Suma people share a common national border with the Gyamans of the Côte d'Ivoire. They used to be one people who were divided during the European scramble for Africa in the nineteenth century. The colonial powers divided their lands into two during the colonial partitioning of the lands occupied by Ghana and the Côte d'Ivoire. These lands became territories for France and territories for England—the Côte d'Ivoire and the Gold Coast (now Ghana), respectively.

Traditionally, the *Sumamanhene* is the nephew of Nana Adinkra, the occupant of the Gyaman stool. However, the colonial demarcations into Ghana and the Côte d'Ivoire did not separate the Gyamans in the Côte d'Ivoire and the Sumas in Ghana in their traditional relationships. They have kept these traditional bonds even after centuries of their colonizations and geographical segregations.²⁰⁴ In a telephone conversation, the

²⁰⁴ Nana Agyei-Kodie Anane-Agyei, *Ghana's Brong-Ahafo Region: The Story of an African Society in the Heart of the World* (Legon Accra, Ghana: Abibrem

Sumamanhene informed me that he even has plans with his traditional younger brother, the *Dormaahene*, to go and help their traditional uncle, the current occupant of Nana Adinkra's stool in the Côte d'Ivoire. The current occupant of the Adinkra stool also leads his people by the stool name Nana Akwasi Adinkra Agyeman. They intend to help him to build a palace for the traditional Gyaman Kingdom in the Côte d'Ivoire. This seems to be proof of the enduring ties they have maintained as one people over the centuries. The Sumas in Ghana have maintained their patriarch Ancestor's (the nephew of Nana Adinkra's) name, Suma; and the Gyamans in the Côte d'Ivoire have also kept the name Gyaman, which was a title Nana Adinkra obtained as "one who left his 'Oman'" ²⁰⁵ (pronounced as "orman"). "Oman" is the Akan referent for "state" or "nation." Therefore, the title Gyaman, which has become the name of that ethnic group, literally, means "you left your state."²⁰⁶ Nana Adinkra was the common maternal uncle of the Sumas in Ghana, the Dormaas, also in Ghana, and the Gyamans in the Côte d'Ivoire.²⁰⁷ The issue that the Akans are a matrilineal group makes the Gyamans, Sumas, and the Dormaas, who are all of the Aduana clan, one big extended family.

The Gyamans in the Côte d'Ivoire and the Sumas in Ghana have continued to celebrate their major traditional festivals together. They mutually cross national borders to help their siblings on either side of the borders to celebrate important festivals with them. For instance, in March 2016, the Gyaman king in the Côte d'Ivoire, Nana Akwasi

Communications, 2012), 223. In my interview with Odeneho Dr. Afram Brempong III, he too mentioned affirmed that history.

²⁰⁵ Oman is the Akan referent for the militarized state. See Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, *The Sacred State of the Akans* (Faber & Faber, 1951). Interview with Nana Kusi Buachi alias Odeneho Dr. Afram Brempong III, History of the Adinkra Symbols.

²⁰⁶ Nana Kusi Buachi alias Odeneho Dr. Afram Brempong III, History of the Adinkra Symbols.

²⁰⁷ Interview with Nana Kusi Buachi alias Odeneho Dr. Afram Brempong III.

Adinkra, came to Ghana to help his traditional nephew, the *Sumamanhene*, launch a development program for the Suma Traditional Area in Ghana. This program included reactivating and reorienting the significance of the Adinkra Symbols for contemporary times.²⁰⁸ Major writers on the Adinkra Symbols, as I pointed out earlier, submit that there was a war about a Gyaman Golden Stool between the Gyamans and the Asantes and that this war has significance for locating the origins of the Adinkra Symbols. It seems important to discuss the issue of the Golden Stool as the cause of the Asante Gyaman war(s). This investigation will help toward making meaning for some of the Adinkra Symbols.

Gyaman Golden Stool, the War, and Making Meaning of Some Adinkra Symbols

The reality that histories hold part of the key to understanding in semiotics, as I intimated in chapter 1, required that I investigate some of the historical accounts behind the creation of some of the Adinkra Symbols. I will show later in this chapter that the Asante-Gyaman war(s) help with identifying the meaning and the theological significant of the *Gye Nyame* Symbol, for instance. Therefore, it was important for me to review the war(s) before then. I reviewed the history in line with my theoretical framework for this dissertation—semiotic anthropological ontology (see chapter 1), which states that the analysis of cultural texts can enable a researcher to get to the meaning of the cultures of peoples. By extension, the analysis of cultures enables a researcher to discover the religious, anthropological ontology of a culture-specific people.

²⁰⁸ Nana Kusi Buachi alias Odeneho Dr. Afram Brempong III.

Again, in chapter 1, I explained that by the theoretical framework, we would discover that religious symbols are products from religious experiences,²⁰⁹ and that for us to understand religious symbols and how they are used, we needed to study them in their contexts. Additionally, I explained in chapter 1 about the type of contextual hermeneutics, which I used for this dissertation. I mentioned that we need to go as close as possible, for the original meanings of the Adinkra symbolic texts through the analysis of the cultural texts, myths, symbols, metaphors, proverbs among others like dance forms, stories, and songs. We need the stories or the sacred myths behind these cultural texts to get to their meanings as the people who own those texts have assigned them (the symbols).

Clifford Geertz, for instance, submitted that the concept of culture is a “semiotic one,”²¹⁰ and therefore, as mentioned in chapter 1, the analysis of culture is about the search for meaning.²¹¹ It is when we have discovered the meanings of cultural texts that we will be able to search for parallels in the scriptures and to apply their meanings to contemporary situations with the partnership of the receiving communities. This is how we are to do ethnohermeneutics with Adinkra Symbols. Such ethnohermeneutical projects, therefore, require a critical partnership of the missionary and the receiving community for identifying meaning, finding parallels, and communicating the relevance of biblical communications for contemporary times.

Again, I invited to the issue that the search for the meanings of these “Geertzian culture as webs of significance” require a prior knowledge of the histories behind the

²⁰⁹ W. H. Turner, “A Model for the Structure of Religion in Relation to the Secular.”

²¹⁰ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.

²¹¹ *ibid.*, 5

cultural text. As Danesi has identified, the search for meaning in the semiotic enterprise routes partly through the histories behind the metaphors or symbols.²¹² It was important for me, therefore, to outline some the relevant historical traditions²¹³ my informants recounted in the field interviews.

I believe that in the attempt to reconstruct histories, as I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, the immediate custodians of the historical tradition constitute a priceless resource, despite their inevitable social additions to the histories they construct. Sarpong notes:

Oral tradition, while it has undoubted tremendous worth, is inadequate in that it tends to omit important details about individual persons and events. It is also often deficient in the description of incidents that are uncomplimentary. These tend to be down-played or even completely omitted ... what goes against the enemy is exaggerated and his qualities disparagingly described, if at all.²¹⁴

For the reasons Sarpong describes above, I conceded that the analysis of oral historical traditions has to be wary of such additions to the original stories. I realized that it is not easy to get to raw histories only by the routes of only one source of the oral traditions. For a relatively accurate tradition, I compared different sources of the stories. I received the historical traditions or stories critically and subjected them to the comparison of notes from other sources, as I indicated in chapter 1. It is for such critical reasons that I have been sampling many sources in this work for the origins of the Adinkra Symbols. I submitted all these notes even though the accounts of such

²¹² Marcel Danesi, *Of Cigarettes, High Heels, and Other Interesting Things: An Introduction to Semiotics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 2.

²¹³ I use "tradition(s)" here to refer to the oral historical narratives which people who are custodians of the accounts tell. They are the handed down stories, customs or rituals of a tribe.

²¹⁴ Peter Sarpong, "Preface" in Adubofour, *Asante*, iii.

custodians of a historical tradition tend to add or take away from issues of the history in their recounting of the history across generations, such oral traditional sources remain indispensable sources for reconstructing historical traditions. I, therefore, submit that historical traditions, no matter how custodians tell them, would continue to be a vital source for rediscovering the past.

In my field interviews, I realized that there was confusion about the actual location of the Gyamans. My informants at Ntonso, for instance, expressed that confusion when they said: “Some of our elders told us the Gyamans were in the Bono Ahafo region of Ghana; yet others told us that they are in the Côte d’Ivoire.” Nkansah-Obrempong also carries the assumption that the Gyamans are in the Côte d’Ivoire.²¹⁵

The *Sumamanhene* informed me that there were as many as six wars in which the Asantes fought the Gyamans, and that in all those wars, Asante never defeated them. This information about the Asantes never defeating them looks contentious. This is because there is a strong pronouncement among the Asantes that they defeated the Gyamans and killed their king, Nana Adinkra. The paramount chief of Bantama, Barfoo Amankwaatia (Nana Bantamahene), is the traditional army general and commander of the traditional army of the Asante Kingdom. In the swearing of the oath of allegiance to the *Asantehene* (king of the Asante Kingdom) of a new *Bantamahene* in 2016, one of the traditional singers of *kwadwom*²¹⁶ in a poetic genre raised a sword before the king and recounted all

²¹⁵ Nkansah-Obrempong, *Visual Theology*, 200.

²¹⁶ Interestingly, “Kwadwom” was used to translate “Lamentation” for the Asante Twi Bible. There is however, a limitation in that translation. This is because, for the Asantes, *kwadwom* does not only remind of very sad past, to brew melancholic feelings, and a hopeless situation. It is also meant to re-ignite, in a contemporary king, the courage and the ability to perform great feats, which their ancestor-kings displayed in their times as leaders of the Asante Kingdom/Confederated State. “Kwadwom” is therefore, sung

the great conquests of the previous Asante kings, from Nana Osei Tutu I. In that appellation, he sung the praise of Nana Osei Tutu I, whose name the present occupant of the Asante Golden Stool bears,²¹⁷ as the one who fought the Gyamans and defeated them, and killed their king, Adinkra. He sang, “W’akum Gyaman Adinkra” (literally, “you have killed Adinkra of the Gyamans”).²¹⁸ When I checked this appellation with the *Sumamanhene*, he contested it strongly and questioned that if it is true that the Asante ever defeated them, why is it that they never became a vassal state to the Asante Kingdom? According to the *Sumamanhene*, the last of the Asante-Gyaman wars was fought around the town Mangye in Banda lands in Ghana. He informed me that the Asantes realized they could not defeat the Gyamans, so they offered them money to make the Gyamans declare that the Asantes have defeated them. However, the *Sumamanhene* informed me that his Ancestors refused the money gift at Mangye. According to the *Sumamanhene*, that is why the place and the town are still called “Mangye” in Ghana even today. “Mangye” in the Bono Twi means “I did not receive [the money].” The *Sumamanhene* questioned, “if the Asantes really defeated the Gyamans and took their golden stool, why is it that the stool at the Manhyia Museum of the king of Asante, which the Asantes display as the one they took from the Gyamans, is a silver one, and not the

during big state gathering as a way of communicating to the sitting king, the need for him to be bold and courageous just like their Ancestors whom they have succeeded did in their times.

²¹⁷ There has only been one Osei Tutu before the current king, who is also Osei Tutu II. There was an Otumfoɔ Osei Tutu Kwame Asibey Bonsu, however, that Asante King is known more as Otumfoɔ Kwame Asibey Bonsu, and not as Osei Tutu. The current king had not gone to any war, not to mention the war with the Gyamans. Therefore, the reference to Osei Tutu, was to Nana Osei Tutu I.

²¹⁸ “W’akum Gyaman Adinkra” means you have killed Adinkra of the Gyamans. The video may be purchased from the Manhyia Museum in Kumasi, Ghana. Watched 07/29/2016.

golden one?”²¹⁹ He further informed me that when the contemporary king of the Gyamans, his traditional uncle, Nana Akwasi Adinkra, came to Ghana for the celebrations of the March 2016 festival, he asked him about the golden stool of the Gyamans, which is in contention. According to the *Sumamanhene*, Nana Akwasi Adinkra Agyeman, the Gyaman king from the Côte d’Ivoire assured him that the stool is still there with him in the Côte d’Ivoire.

However, it may be important for us to note that there has been more than one king of the Gyamans who ruled with his stool name as Nana Adinkra. For instance, I mentioned that even the current king of the Gyamans in the Côte d’Ivoire is called Nana Akwasi Adinkra Agyeman. It is very probable that Nkansah-Obrempong was mixing up the wars, thinking that there was only one war between the Asantes and the Gyamans.

I have noted that in all the Asante-Gyaman wars, the Suma wing of the Gyaman Kingdom served as the reconnaissance wing of the Gyaman army.²²⁰ The Suma history in Nana Agyei-Kodie’s book informs that the Suma chief served in the reconnaissance role so well that the king of the Gyamans honored him with the privilege of having the use of a “double canopy umbrella,” which is known in the Bono language as “Ebi da bi akyi.”²²¹ “Ebi da bi akyi” literally means “there is power, which is more powerful behind every power.”

²¹⁹ Even though that is a good rhetoric, it can also be the case that the Asantes are not displaying that particular Gyaman Golden Stool for security reasons.

²²⁰ Nana Agyei-Kodie Anane-Agyei, *Ghana’s Brong-Ahafo Region: The Story of an African Society in the Heart of the World* (Accra: Abibrem Communications, 2015), 223.

²²¹ Anane-Agyei., 223. “Ebi da ebi akyi” literally, means that some come after others. Figuratively, it can mean that some have more prominence than others.

Was the Asante–Gyaman War in the Côte d’Ivoire or in Ghana?

The Gyaman-related people in Ghana today carry the name “Suma” more than the name “Gyamans.” They are located in the Gyaman district of the Bono Ahafo region (see the map on page 96). The reason why the wars of the Asantes with the Gyamans are called the Asante-Gyaman war(s), and not Asante-Suma war(s), even when the Gyamans are in the Côte d’Ivoire now, is reasonable. The apparent confusion is about the issue that people have not realized that the Gyamans and Sumas were at the periods of the wars, one people. They had not been separated then by colonial powers from the West.²²² This means that the Asante-Gyaman wars were fought before the European powers scrambled for Africa in the nineteenth century. This is another reason that makes an earlier dating of the original Asante-Gyaman war more probable.

Was there an Asante-Gyaman War or Wars?

My informants only spoke of one Asante-Gyaman war. Nkansah-Obrempong’s work supports this one-time Asante-Gyaman war.²²³ However, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the *Sumamanhene* informed me that in all, there were six wars between the Asantes and the Gyamans. It is probable, as Anane-Agyei points out, that the wars were fought partly for the control of the profitable trade routes to the coast further south.²²⁴ However, the widely-held reason my informants gave me for the war was about the Gyaman golden stool. Although this reason for the Asante-Gyaman war was not new to the *Sumamanhene*, he informed me that the real reason for the war was that Nana Osei

²²² Anane-Agyei, 223.

²²³ Nkansah-Obrempong, *Visual Theology*, 201.

²²⁴ Anane-Agyei, *Ghana’s Brong-Ahafo Region: The Story of an African Society in the Heart of the World*, 184.

Tutu of the Asantes wanted to take revenge on the Gyamans. According to him, the Gyamans once lived at Suntreso with their brothers and sisters, the Dormaas, and the Sumas. The history of the Dormaas in Nana Agyei-Kodie's book confirms the Suntreso settlement of the Gyamans, Dormaa, and Sumas before their migrations to their present settlements.²²⁵ Suntreso in those years was not a part of Kumasi, which was then known as Kwamang. Suntreso was located then at the southwest of Kumasi.²²⁶ According to the *Sumamanhene*, they fought and killed the Kumasi/Kwaman chief, who was called Nana Obiri Yeboah (1660–1680). Aye-Addo supports this seventeenth-century dating as the period when the Akans started settling in present-day Ghana and the Côte d'Ivoire from the northern parts of Africa.²²⁷ However, the *Sumamanhene* argued that the real reason for the initial war was for revenge. He told me that Nana Osei Tutu I wanted revenge for the death of his late uncle whom he succeeded as the chief of Kumasi. The opportunity for the revenge came when Nana Osei Tutu I founded the Asante Confederacy and acquired the great Asante military might.

The *Sumamanhene* informed me:

Indeed, when we left Kumasi, there was no Asante King, but a Kumasihene.²²⁸ It's also a fact that it was the war that defeated the Asantes and killed Obiri Yeboah, which brought the Asantes together and called themselves 'Osa Nti,' which corrupted to become Asante.²²⁹

²²⁵ Anane-Agyei., 184

²²⁶ Anane-Agyei., 184.

²²⁷ Charles Sarpong Aye-Addo, *Akan Christology: An Analysis of the Christologies of John Samuel Pobee and Kwame Bediako in Conversation with the Theology of Karl Barth*, Kindle (Pickwick Publications, 2013), 1.

²²⁸ He obviously meant Kwamanhene, because there was no Kumasihene then. Kumasi then was known as Kwaman.

²²⁹ In a WhatsApp chat on Tuesday, May 10, 2016, at 12:12 pm. In fact, the reference to the "Ashantis," in Odeneho's comment has historically chronological ellipses. The movement from Kwaman/Kumasi to the Asante (anglicized as Ashanti) has many important historical events compressed here. From Kumasihene (the Chief of Kumasi),

However, the widely-spread historical tradition about why the Asantes came together was for defending themselves against the Denkyiras, as Willis articulates,²³⁰ as well as the need to break the torture of the Denkyiras over them as vassal states. The issue that the Gyamans were the reason for the Asante confederacy is not as popular as this Denkyira one.

The *Sumamanhene* says that the desire for revenge on the part of the Asantes was the reason why their uncle left Suntreso to the current Gyaman Traditional Area. This reason is also intimated in Nana Agyei-Kodie's book.²³¹ The Dormaas left and settled at Bomaa, which is near Asante Tapa, and eventually left some of their people at Bomaa and moved on to settle at the present-day Dormaa Traditional Area.

Suma, on the the other hand, migrated to Hwibaa, near Tapa, and eventually moved further away to Nsuatre in the Bono Ahafo Region of Ghana. Suma later moved to join his uncle, Nana Kwadwo Adinkra and settled at the present-day Suma Traditional Area in the modern-day Jaman political district in Ghana.

Nana Osei Tutu confederated the Asante towns and villages into the Asante Kingdom. As I have indicated earlier in this chapter, the confederation was done for the primary purpose of war. For fighting for their independence from the Denkyiras, and as it happened, later, it became a nation with a relatively powerful army, which was used for the expansion of the Asante Kingdom for economic reasons. Odeneho's comment therefore, is a way of saying that Nana Osei Tutu I, when he had founded the Asante Confederacy, and gotten a mighty army, which had been motivated by the victory of the Asantes over the great Denkyiras, decided to take revenge on the Gyamans for the death of His Uncle, Nana Obiri Yeboah who was the Kumasihene before him.

²³⁰ Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary*, 16.

²³¹ Anane-Agyei, *Ghana's Brong-Ahafo Region: The Story of an African Society in the Heart of the World*, 183-184.

The Reasons for Asante-Gyaman Wars

My informants at the Center for National Culture in Kumasi,²³² at Ntonso,²³³ Archbishop Sarpong,²³⁴ and others, all agree with Nkansah-Obrempong that the reason for the Asante-Gyaman war was that the Gyaman king, Nana Adinkra, had also made for himself a Golden Stool. They also agree with Nkansah-Obrempong²³⁵ that the *Asantehene* already had a Golden Stool, and that he considered the creation of the Gyaman Golden Stool as a challenge to his divine lordship.²³⁶ It seems that part of whatever issues might have given rise to the war, included what Nana Agyei-Kodie gets from the *Dormaahene*, and includes in his book.²³⁷ The Nana Agyei-Kodie's account says the wars were about the scramble for the control of the profitable trade routes in the forest regions of Ghana.

Akans are divided into eight clans.²³⁸ The Gyamans belong to the Aduana clan.²³⁹ Akan folklore says that the Aduanas were the first clan to have come from God. It is said

²³² Research Officer, Adinkra Interview at the Center for National Culture, Kumasi, Person to person, May 30, 2016.

²³³ Nyamaa and Brobbey, The Origins, Social and Religious Significance of the Adinkra Symbols Paul and Kwadwo Brobbey.

²³⁴ Sarpong, Interview on the Religious and Social Significance of the Adinkra Symbols.

²³⁵ Nkansah-Obrempong, *Visual Theology*, 200-201.

²³⁶ Asante tradition says that the great Traditional Priest of the Asantes, Okomfo Anokye, commanded the Asante Golden Stool, which is the soul of the Asantes and the Asante Kingdom from heaven. See the Footnotes of Nkansah-Obrempong, *Virtual Theology*, 201. The reason of the golden stool from heaven, for the Asantes, means that God himself founded their kingdom, and made the Asantehene (the king) a divinely appointed ruler. That is why the Asantehene and his people saw the Gyaman Golden Stool as a threat to his divine kingship.

²³⁷ Anane-Agyei, *Ghana's Brong-Ahafo Region: The Story of an African Society in the Heart of the World*, 183-186.

²³⁸ Aduana, Agona, Asenie, Asakyiri, Asona, Bretuo, Ekuona, and Oyoko. See Meyerowitz, *The Sacred State of the Akans*, 27-32.

²³⁹ Members of the Akan clans can be found in different ethnic groupings in Ghana. They share a common maternal ancestor along their ancestral line. In Ghana, one might

they appeared somewhere around the Volta River. According to the narrative, they are the children of Onyankopon (the Supreme Being), and as such, God gave them Golden Stools.²⁴⁰ It is very likely that this is the golden stool that Nana Adinkra had. Therefore, the *Dormaamanhene*, the cousin of the *Sumamanhene*, and their uncle, the king of the Gyaman Kingdom, all had golden stools.²⁴¹ The *Dormaahene*, for instance, claims to have a Golden Stool as an Aduana.²⁴² This means that Nana Adinkra could have been the owner of a Golden Stool even before the *Asantehene*'s. We can hold the argument that the Gyamans might have had a golden stool before the Asante king because according to Asante traditions, it was during the beginning of the reign of Nana Osei Tutu I that his traditional priest friend, Okomfoɔ Anokye, commanded the Asante Golden Stool from the sky for him as the sign that God has elected him to be the king of the newly-founded Asante Kingdom. This will date the Asante acquisition of the Asante Golden Stool in the seventeenth century. However, the Gyamans might have had their Golden Stool even before they migrated to settle at Suntreso.

The reality that there has been many Nana Adinkras as rulers of the Gyamans allows for reasonable speculations. It is likely that the earlier writers missed the multiples of Nana Adinkras as monarchs of the Gyamans, and therefore, settled for only one Asante-Gyaman war. The Kwamanhene, Nana Osei Tutu I, must have gone to war

different ethnic groups all tracing their clan to a common clan (i.e. "Abusua"). Since the clan gives people their true belonging, a person from a different tribe/ethnic group can be allowed to inherit or ascend/sit on royal stools of the same clan in another tribe. Thus, I am an Asante who is an Aduana, the Paramount chief of Suma Traditional Area, who is Bono by tribe, sees me as a nephew. This is because he is also Aduana.

²⁴⁰ Anane-Agyei, *Ghana's Brong-Ahafo Region: The Story of an African Society in the Heart of the World*, 183.

²⁴¹ Anane-Agyei., 183-185

²⁴² Anane-Agyei, 183.

with the original Nana Adinkra, who probably ruled the Gyamans and Sumas in the seventeenth century.²⁴³ Again, the multiple-war revelation will make it reasonable to speculate that the subsequent Asante-Gyaman wars were fought over the need to control the profitable trade routes mentioned earlier. The multiple Asante-Gyaman wars will make room for a reasonable chronological order. We then can propose that the first war between the Asantes and the Gyamans was more about Nana Osei Tutu I's need for revenge for the death of his maternal uncle whom the Gyamans killed in an earlier war. The understanding that the first war was about Nana Osei Tutu I's need for revenge, also makes room for the proposal that the later wars between the Asantes and Gyamans were over the control of the profitable gold trade routes in the forest belt of the area in those periods of their histories. With such an explanation, the alleged Asante attempt to bribe the Gyamans will be meaningful, because that would have been an option for the Asantes to gain the control of the trade routes.

Aye-Addo mentions the issue of a profitable gold trade in that area.²⁴⁴ This seems to have been what actually happened. Whatever the case may have been, some significant issues stand out clearly: First, nobody disputes that there was Asante-Gyaman war(s). Again, we know that part of the provoking issues for the war was about the Golden Stools. However, there were other provocative issues, like interests in controlling profitable trade routes, as well as ulterior issues like seeking revenge for the death of Nana Osei Tutu's uncle, Nana Obiri Yeboah.

²⁴³ <http://wp.me/p7cG3O-Om> (see the last paragraphs for the dating of the probable first war). See also Sarpong Aye-Addo, *Akan Christology: An Analysis of the Christologies of John Samuel Pobee and Kwame Bediako in Conversation with the Theology of Karl Barth*.

²⁴⁴ Sarpong Aye-Addo., 1.

The Nana Adinkra of the Gyamans Origin of the Adinkra Symbols Theory

As indicated earlier I realized that an interview with the Gyamans was *sine qua non*. I elected to interview the *Sumamanhene*, whose people were said to be the remnants of the Gyamans in Ghana today. I chose to interview the *Sumamanhene* in an attempt to get to the real issues about the Adinkra Symbols. Again, I chose him because I had heard that the *Sumamanhene* had invited his traditional uncle, the current occupant of the Gyaman stool in the Côte d'Ivoire, Nana Kwasi Adinkra Agyeman, to the festival. I realized that an interview with the *Sumamanhene* was going to be like killing two birds with one stone.

In the interviews with the *Sumamanhene*, I discovered with convincing evidence that Nana Kwadwo Adinkra Agyeman, a patriarch king of the Gyamans, was, in fact, the creator of the first Adinkra Symbols. The *Sumamanhene*, for instance, had made the claim that his uncle, Nana Adinkra, was the creator of the Adinkra Symbols in a national newspaper, *The Daily Graphic*, and on national television.²⁴⁵ He told me that no scholar or custodian of traditional culture had come out to challenge his claims. I have held several follow-up WhatsApp chats and telephone conversations for clarifying issues with the *Sumamanhene*. In one of such chats, the *Sumamanhene* commented on some of the theories of the origins of the Adinkra Symbols in Danzy's MA thesis.²⁴⁶ In that thesis, Danzy had played down on the Gyaman origins of the Adinkra Symbols. The *Sumamanhene* lamented:

distortions all through the dissertation. Since the launch of the Adinkra lectures, nobody has come out to challenge my claims and this was widely

²⁴⁵ Emmanuel Adu-Gyamrah, "Daily Graphic, March 16, 2016," *Daily Graphic*, March 16, 2016.

²⁴⁶ Danzy, "Adinkra Symbols: An Ideographic Writing System."

publicized both on the radio and TV including the print media. I still know for a fact the distortions have created so much confusion stories about the claim by the Ashantis.²⁴⁷

I checked the website of the national daily newspaper, *Graphic Online*,²⁴⁸ and discovered that an Emmanuel Adu-Gyamerah reported on the *Sumamanhene's* Adinkra lectures. In the publication, he emphasized the bold and exclusive statement that Nana Kwadwo Adinkra created the Adinkra Symbols. The silence in the face of these publications against the backdrop of the massive publications of scholarship theories appears significant. The loud silence in the face of the *Sumamanhene's* exclusive claim seems to speak loudly in support of his declarations in Ghana's global, scholarly, and traditional spheres that Nana Kwadwo Adinkra Agyeman of the Gyamans indeed created the Adinkra Symbols. Not even the king of the Asantes had disputed those exclusive claims. In accordance with the theoretical framework of this research, now that we have discovered who appears to be the creator of the first Adinkra Symbols, there is the need to find the stories behind the creation of those Adinkra Symbols. The analysis of these stories will enable us to discover the original meanings of those Symbols, as we want to do.

The First Adinkra Symbols Created, and Why?

According to the *Sumamanhene*, the first Adinkra Symbol, which Nana Kwadwo Adinkra Agyeman created, was the *Obi nka obi* Symbol²⁴⁹ (see Figure below).

²⁴⁷ In a WhatsApp chat, June 11, 2016 at 9:00 am (GMT).

²⁴⁸ *Adinkra symbols: A means of communication and expression of culture*, www.graphiconline.com.gh, March 16, 2016.

²⁴⁹ Odencho Dr. Afram Brempong III, Field Interview with him. June 4, 2016. See also the publication in the Daily Graphic of March 16, 2016, cited earlier.



Figure 9
Obi nka obi or Obi nka 'bi

The *Sumamanhene* informed me that a civil war was almost breaking out in the Gyaman Kingdom in the days of Nana Kwadwo Adinkra Agyeman between the subchiefs. He said that Nana Kwadwo Adinkra received the *bi nka bi*²⁵⁰ Symbol in a dream as an issue for quelling the war that was erupting. The *Sumamanhene* informed me that Nana Kwadwo Adinkra eventually called together all the angry subchiefs and explained the Symbol to them, and that became the olive branch that quelled the imminent civil war.

Again, the *Sumamanhene* told me that whenever Nana Adinkra received such inspirations about a Symbol, the king would wake up from his dream and draw the symbol on a gourd (*duatoa*, literally, “tree-bottle” in Bono Twi)²⁵¹ that was not fully grown and was still on the tree. He also informed me that as the gourds continued to grow and enlarged on the tree, they enlarged the Adinkra Symbols for people to see them more clearly. This became the means of receiving, publishing and preserving the Symbols. According to the *Sumamanhene*, Nana Kwadwo Adinkra later engraved the *Obi nka bi* Symbol on his Golden Stool.²⁵²

The story above implies that the original purpose of the *Obi nka 'bi* Symbol was for quelling an impending war. Therefore, it became a symbol of peace for the Gyaman Kingdom. The development that the king of the Asantes continued to wear the *Obi nka*

²⁵⁰ The Bono Twi rendering of “Obi nka Obi” in Asante Twi.

²⁵¹ Also published in the Daily Graphic feature publication of March 16, 2016. See also James Nkansah-Obrempong, *Visual Theology*, 2010, 200f.

²⁵² Daily Graphic, March 16, 2016.

'bi Symbol on his headgears when he is attending gatherings of the Asante Kingdom is significant. This means that the Asantes kept the same meaning, significance, and purpose of that Adinkra Symbol (see Figure below).



Figure 10

The King of the Asante Kingdom, Otumfoɔ Osei Tutu II, with an *Obi nka 'bi* headgear, sitting in a *palanquin* to an Asante Kingdom *durbar*.

Willis interpreted this symbol as meaning “no one should bite another, outrage or provoke another.”²⁵³ It can be translated as “if you live in a glass house do not throw stones.” Literally, as an emic person, I see it used as meaning more of “one does not have to bite the other since we are interrelated and interdependent.” This understanding of the *Obi nka 'bi* Symbol suggests that it is a Symbol that communicates that the survival of the other ensures the survival of all. It appears that in the setting of and the declared purpose for the creation of the *Obi nka 'bi* Symbol, this seems to be more of how it was originally meant to communicate. This would be especially so if Nana Kwadwo Adinkra Agyeman’s inspired intention was to use it to quell the imminent civil war in his kingdom, as the *Sumamanhene* told me.

Originally, the *Obi nka 'bi* Symbol was a drawing of two catfish (or as some informants told me, lizards) with the tails of each other in each other’s mouthes and

²⁵³ Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary: A Visual Primer on the Language of Adinkra*, 86.

between each other's teeth. The Symbol has assumed the above artistic form for the need for simplification. The use of two crocodiles in Willis' book, though possible, is not very popular.²⁵⁴ It is good that Willis admits that the designs for the Symbols may have several versions, and also admits that the image of two fish is sometimes used²⁵⁵ as Kwame Amoah Larbi, a senior research fellow at the University of Ghana uses in the figure below.



Figure 11
The original created "Obi nka 'bi" Symbol, according to my informant, which is cast in brass by a traditional brass smith.²⁵⁶

It is for such reasons that Agbo contends that the Adinkra Symbols are appreciated in Ghana for both "their aesthetic and communicative values."²⁵⁷ I can see the frustrations of Agbo when he laments, "however, these symbols are mostly appreciated on their aesthetic values only."²⁵⁸ Agbo's description of the value of the Adinkra Symbols is significant. According to him, symbols are "are mostly non-verbal illustration of proverbs, parables and maxims, which portray the philosophical thinking

²⁵⁴ Willis,. 87.

²⁵⁵ , Willis,. 87.

²⁵⁶ Larbi, Kwame Amoah, "Reading the Intangible Heritage in Tangible Akan Art." https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiSgaG22M3NAhXEeCYKHZhKDvQQjRwIBQ&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ijih.org%2FfileDown.down%3FfilePath%3D4%2Fdtl%2F333f0e40-d616-4698-a0ae-b9a90d00b47b%26fileName%3DVol.4-3.pdf%26contentType%3DvolumeDtl%26downFileId%3D44&psig=AFQjCNF8N7ydbXGgo9B8_1MKJ72Hyed0Q&ust=1467304696148487 (public domain, 6/4/2016).

²⁵⁷ Agbo, *Values of Adinkra Symbols*, v.

²⁵⁸ Agbo, v.

and the way of life of a particular group of people.”²⁵⁹ This significance of the Adinkra Symbols is also articulated in the *Daily Graphic* publication, which I cited earlier. In that publication, the *Sumamanhene* is reported to have said:

The varied Adinkra Symbols espouse and highlight the philosophical underpinnings of African traditional cultural beliefs and practices including the existence and supremacy of God, unity in diversity as well as the concept of power and authority.²⁶⁰

My field research gave me the conclusions that the Adinkra Symbols have their own conceptual religious, social, and economic meanings embedded in the historical experiences of the Akan people. The creation stories of the Adinkra Symbols were not only inspired through dreams, but some of them were also built from historical experiences, which the creators did not want their descendants to lose memory of.

The Adinkra Symbols and Biblical Symbolic Paradigms: An Illustration

One of the symbols that was created from the historical experiences of the Ancestors of the Akans is the *Gye Nyame* Symbol. Chapter 3 outlines the purpose of the *Gye Nyame* symbol to carry the faith of the Ancestors from one generation of Gyamans to another.

With the data I have gathered from my fieldwork, I believed, unlike scholars like Nkansah-Obrempong and Danquah, that the Adinkra Symbols have an origin, and that the origin is not in circumstances, but that the origins of the Adinkra Symbols are in the inspired creative work of a person—Nana Kwadwo Adinkra Agyeman, a patriarch king of the Gyamans. This is why the *Sumamanhene's* comment, “Nana Adinkra was a

²⁵⁹ Adolph Hilary Agbo, *Values of Adinkra and Agama Symbols* (Kumasi: Bigshy Designs and Publications, 2006), v.

²⁶⁰ Adu-Gyamerah, “Daily Graphic, March 16, 2016.”

charismatic and inspirational leader who ruled the Gyaman Kingdom” in history is very significant.²⁶¹

Were the Gyamans the Only Creators of the Adinkra Symbols?

Even though the Gyamans were the creators of some of the Adinkra Symbols, as I have tried to explain, it seems that there were other groups or states who also created additional symbols to the group of symbols under the canopy of the phenomenal art pieces we know today as Adinkra Symbols. The quantity of the symbols, which fall under the umbrella of what is known in Ghana and around the world today as the Adinkra Symbol, is too big to have been created by one individual. At Ntonso, my informants told me that even in our contemporary times, people continue to create additions to the Adinkra Symbols.²⁶² People, such as my informants at Ntonso, Agbo²⁶³ and Kojo Arthur Adinkra-who is reviewing his work on the Adinkra Symbols in Ghana now,²⁶⁴ have all created and added to the symbols. I have noted that different ethnic groups in Ghana have symbols that look like the Adinkra Symbols.

The Ga People of Ghana have Their Symbols

The information I have gathered suggests that the different tribal groups emerging in the geographical location, which is referred to as Ghana today, all had some form of symbols. For instance, the Ga people in Ghana have their own line of traditional

²⁶¹ Adu-Gyamerah. Emphasis mine.

²⁶² Agbo, *Values of Adinkra Symbols*, x.

²⁶³ Agbo, *Values of Adinkra and Agama Symbols*, iv.

²⁶⁴ George F. Kojo Arthur, *Cloth as a Metaphor: (Re)Reading the Adinkra Cloth Symbols of the Akan of Ghana* (Accra, Legon: Centre for Indigenous Knowledge Systems, 2001).

symbols, which are like the Adinkra Symbols. However, the Ga people do not refer to those symbols as Adinkra Symbols.²⁶⁵ They are simply referred to as Ga symbols.

The Ethnic Groups of Northern Ghana and Other Scholars Have Their Symbols

Again, according to Agbo, several of the ethnic groups in the northern parts of Ghana also have such traditional symbols.²⁶⁶

Asantes had their Symbols

Bowdich, whose colonial appointment as an emissary to the Gold Coast (now Ghana), in another instance, informs in his writing that the Asantes had symbols.²⁶⁷ Bowdich reports having seen repeated symbols in the clothes that the Akan men were wearing in the celebration of Odwira.²⁶⁸ He made a painting of this celebration in 1817, and said that this was a year before the Asante-Denkyira war.

However, whatever types of symbols they were, they could not really have been Adinkra Symbols—that would have been anachronistic because the Asante-Denkyira war, as I have argued earlier in this chapter, was fought after King Osei Tutu 1 became the founder and therefore, the first king of the Asante Kingdom. Nana Osei Tutu ruled Asante from 1680–1717. Nana Osei Tutu built the Asante Confederacy. The Asante-Gyaman war could only have been fought before 1717, and not a century later. However, if Bowdich had seen symbols in use before the Asante-Denkyira war, then Bowdich's contribution supports the idea that there were already some forms of symbols in circulation before the Asante-Gyaman wars, and even before the Asante-Denkyira war.

²⁶⁵ See Appendix 4

²⁶⁶ Agbo, *Values of Adinkra Symbols*, xi.

²⁶⁷ Thomas E. Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast to Ashantee*, 1819. Cited in Jasmine Danzy, "Adinkra Symbols: An Ideographic Writing System" (MA, Stone Brook University, Graduate School, 2009), Stone Brook University Library, 9.

²⁶⁸ Odwira is a State purification festival among the Akans.

This probably means that the Asantes already had some symbols in circulation before they fought the Gyamans.

Synchronizing the History as an Emic Person

The real issue is not about whether the Asantes had their symbols, as Bowdich submits, but that it may be possible that the Asantes had their own symbols and adopted the term “Adinkra Symbols” as a generic name for all the artistic and rhetoric symbols, which were in circulation then. This would surely have been the issue when they saw the quantity and aesthetic beauty of the symbols they might have taken from Nana Adinkra’s kingdom, and have understood the concepts which those symbols carried. They might have also brought all the symbols, which they continued to create after those ones, under the group name “Adinkra Symbols.”²⁶⁹

In any case, the Gyamans themselves are a stock of the Akans. What is more, peoples around the world all have symbols, so it would be strange if the other Akans had no symbols before the Asante-Gyaman war. However, it is also plausible that whatever symbolizations the Asantes had could not have been called “Adinkra Symbols” before the Asante-Gyaman wars. It seems that whatever referent the Asantes had for their symbols before their war with the Gyamans might have been swallowed up by the referent “Adinkra Symbols” after the Asante encounter with the Gyamans.

Conclusion

In chapter 2, I have evaluated some of the literature on the origins of the Adinkra Symbols. I limited myself to the works by Joseph Boakye Danquah, Nkansah-

²⁶⁹ Interview with the Research Officer at the Center for National Culture, Kumasi, 2016. Also Kwadwo, Osei Kwadwo Interview. Paul Nyamaa and Kwadwo Brobbey, Ntonso Adinkra Interview, Person to person, June 15, 2016.

Obrempong, Robert Rattray, Adolph H. Agbo, and Kwaku Boateng for discussing the theories of origins of the Adinkra Symbols. I have further evaluated these literatures with data from my ethnographic interviews, and these have facilitated the formation of a relatively deeper and more informed proposition of the origins of the Adinkra Symbols.

I have made the Claim that the Adinkra Symbols have an origin, and that the origin is not in circumstances, as Danquah and Nkansah-Obrempong submit, but that the origins of the Adinkra Symbols are in the inspired creative work of a person—Nana Kwadwo Adinkra Agyeman, a patriarch king of the Gyamans.

I have argued that the search for the origins of the Adinkra Symbols is important for at least, three reasons. First, it was going to help with identifying the creator(s) of the Adinkra Symbols, and then provide us with information on why and how they created the Symbols. Second, I identified the immediate rhetoric that the creators of the symbols assigned specific Adinkra Symbols. I have also discussed the theory that the Nana Kwadwo Adinkra Agyeman of the Gyaman kingdom, whose name the Adinkra Symbols bear, created most of the initially recognized Adinkra Symbols. However, I have argued that Nana Kwadwo Adinkra Agyeman could not have been the only one who created all the Adinkra Symbols.

I have also explained that there has been more than one Asante-Gyaman war as most of the scholars assume. I have submitted that there has been at least, six Asante-Gyaman wars in the history of the two kingdoms. I have also argued that the reasons for the Asante-Gyaman wars were multifaceted, ranging from the need for revenge to the need to control profitable trade routes. Equally importantly, I have retold the stories, or myths, about how some of the religious Adinkra Symbols were created, and their

significance in the social and religious space of the Akans. I made the arguments above partly because the Adinkra Symbols are rhetoric that have to be understood for them to serve their intended purposes.

In chapter 3, I will discuss the Adinkra Symbols as symbolic rhetoric from the experiences of the creators of those Symbols. Kwesi Yankah's *Textile Rhetoric*²⁷⁰ and Barber's Symbol as texts will largely inform and undergird the main discussions in that chapter.

²⁷⁰ Yankah, *Speaking for the Chief*, 81-83.

Chapter 3

Adinkra: Symbolic Rhetoric from Experience



Figure 12

Nyame nti [mennwe ahahan]

In chapter 2, I submitted that the Adinkra Symbols are speechifying. I intend to explain the ways in which the Adinkra Symbols rhetoric in this chapter. I am beginning the move toward that purpose by recounting a story I was told at Ntonso during my field research. The issue that the Adinkra Symbols rhetoric is an important step toward the recognition that the religious Adinkra Symbols can be creedal symbols for the Akan (if they are not already), and that by a semiotic analysis, using ethnohermeneutics (i.e. contextual hermeneutics) as I explained in chapter 1, we can get to their intended meanings. That way, we will be able to find parallel stories in Scripture and apply the meaning of the symbols appropriately in contemporary contexts.

The Ntonso story was about a woman from another village near Ntonso. Her husband had divorced her for another woman from the city. According to the story, some elders of that village tried to talk the man out of the decision to divorce the wife from the village, but he did not listen to them. He went ahead to divorce the wife even though he could not prefer any divorce-provoking charge(s) against her. After about two years, the divorced woman, who had become more beautiful, contracted the Adinkra cloth imprinters in Ntonso to craft a piece of black and white cloth for her. The woman asked

them to print the *Nyame nti* and the *Hye a anhye* Symbols in the cloth. She was going to use the six-yard cloth to sew a *kaba*²⁷¹ and slit.²⁷² The divorced woman intended to wear that *kaba* and slit to the Sunday gathering of the funeral rites of her former husband's father.²⁷³

This story has importance for the discussions about Adinkra Symbols as rhetoric symbols. However, before we come to that discussion, let me first point out that the divorced woman's wearing of the Adinkra cloth to the funeral was going to be such rhetoric. Traditional Akans at the funeral were going to decipher that the divorced woman was going to communicate to her former husband and all the traditional people who were going to be at the Sunday extension of the funeral, and who knew her story with her former husband, were going to understand the significance that cloth was impregnated with. It may be important to point out that among the Akans of Ghana, and even those in the Côte d'Ivoire, colors of cloths and symbols imprinted in the cloths are largely not taken only for aesthetic purposes; people identify them, more significantly, as instruments for communication as well.²⁷⁴ In the case of the rhetoric of the cloth, which

²⁷¹ Kaba is a kind of traditional blouse, which Ghanaian women wear on their slits.

²⁷² Slit is like a long skirt to the ankles that Ghanaian women wear with their "kabas."

²⁷³ In Ghana, the Asantes hold their funeral rites on either Thursdays or Saturdays. In contemporary times, families hold most of the funerals on Saturdays. The families, relatives, and friends who mourn with the families of the deceased go to Church for a Thanksgiving Service on the Sundays following the Saturdays of the funerals. Sympathizers would attend these Thanksgiving Services in black and white clothing. After the Thanksgiving Services, there is another gathering in the afternoons of the Sundays. People would continue to come and console the bereaved families and help with donations. These Sundays' funeral attendees are usually, those who were not able to come to the Saturday final funeral gathering. Those who come to the funerals on Sundays would also come in black and white dresses and cloths. It was to such a Sunday funeral gathering that the divorced woman intended to attend in the white cloth with the black "Nyame nti" and "Hye a anhye" Adinkra Symbols imprints in the kaba and slit.

²⁷⁴ See Agbo, *Values of Adinkra Symbols*. And Yankah, *Speaking for the Chief*.

this divorced woman was going to wear, we need to look at the meanings of the *Nyame Nti* and the *Hye a anhye*” Adinkra Symbols.

The Contextual Meanings of the *Nyame Nti* and *Hye a Anhye* Symbolisms

The full referent of *Nyame nti*,” according to Peter Acheampong, is *Nyame nti me nnwe ahahan*.²⁷⁵ Literally, this means, “because of God’s providence, I will not be chewing or feeding on leaves.” The vernacular expression that someone “chews leaves,” among the Akans, means that the person has been reduced to the level of an animal, because of extreme poverty. The intention to wear that cloth to the funeral was therefore, going to be the obviously, embittered divorced woman’s way of telling the former husband that God has been taking good care of her and her children in spite of the divorce. For the traditional people, the woman did not have to verbally communicate that; she insinuated that message clearly through her cloth rhetoric.

The *Hye a anhye* Symbol literally means “that which cannot be burnt, even when fire is set to it.” Willis literally translates it as “burn ... you do not burn.”²⁷⁶ My informants at Ntonso and Kumasi (especially Kingsley Nsiah of the focus group at Atwima Koforidua Methodist Church) told me that the full expression of the *hye a anhye* Adinkra Symbol is “*dee wode wo tiri akɔhyɛ no nti, wɔhyɛ wo a wonhyɛ*” or “*Nyame a wode wo tiri akɔhyɛ ne mu no nti, wɔhyɛ wo a wonhyɛ*.” This literally means that “because of where you have taken refuge, no one will be able to burn you even when they set you on fire.” It can also mean “because of the God in whom you have taken refuge, no one will be able to burn you even when they set you on fire.”

²⁷⁵ Acheampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, 10.

²⁷⁶ Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary*, 119.

Therefore, in wearing that symbol to the funeral, the divorced woman meant to communicate to her former husband that she has refuge in God, so no person or situation will be able to destroy her. As Yankah points out, there is such a thing as “textile rhetoric”²⁷⁷ among the Akans of Ghana. Such communication via cloth names and symbols imprinted in cloths and even dance forms constitutes issues about symbolic rhetoric or communications in Ghana.

Adinkra Symbolizations as Textile Rhetoric

I made the case that the Adinkra Symbols’ rhetoric have always been meant to serve those speechifying purposes. By rhetoric, I imply the understanding in which Yankah, Agbo, and Achampong use it either directly or indirectly.²⁷⁸ According to Yankah, he means “a channel for the silent projection of argument.”²⁷⁹ These scholars seem to understand what Sarpong affirms: “These Symbols [the Adinkra Symbols] do not only express ideas about life in general, but also concepts about God and religious beliefs ... The Adinkra Symbols are age-old pictorial presentations of the values that have stood Akans in good stead for so long.”²⁸⁰

It is for such instrumental purposes that the divorced woman in the introductory story of this chapter used the Adinkra Symbols. However, by rhetoric significance in this work, I mean the communication of concepts, which represent the values and insinuations that many people in a religious and social setting accept and understand as

²⁷⁷ Yankah, *Speaking for the Chief*, 81-83. See also, Agbo, *Values of Adinkra Symbols*, xi.

²⁷⁸ Yankah, *Speaking for the Chief*, 81-83. See Agbo, *Values of Adinkra Symbols*, x-xi.

²⁷⁹ Yankah, *Speaking for the Chief*, 81.

²⁸⁰ Peter Sarpong, “Foreword” in Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, iv-v.

communicative tools. This is what Mathias A. H. Zahniser refers to as “dominant symbols.”²⁸¹ For Zahniser, dominant symbols are those that “represent the values most people in a society and/or religious tradition accept as obviously true.”²⁸² As Agbo has noted, the people of religious and social settings create such symbolic rhetoric for creating and expressing ideas and values for themselves.²⁸³ Therefore, when I referred to the Adinkra Symbols as rhetoric, I only recognized their intended purposes of communicating concepts, beliefs, philosophies, and insinuations among other realities for the Akan person or communities. The Akan people use these symbolic languages without necessarily using words or spoken communications. Traditional Akans understand such Adinkra rhetoric. In fact, even the hybrid Akans, including those in the diaspora, understand the rhetoric of a few major Adinkra Symbols such as the *Gye Nyame*, *Obi nka* ‘bi, and the *Fihankra*.

Figure 13 below is an example of this understanding of Adinkra symbolizations as constituting rhetoric (or textile rhetoric).



Figure 13
Odenho Dr. Affram Brempong III, the paramount chief of the Suma Traditional Area (British Gyaman) clad in rich Kente cloth, which is full of Adinkra Symbols. It is significant that the *Obi nka*

²⁸¹ Zahniser, *Symbol and Ceremony: Making Disciples Across Cultures*, 78.

²⁸² Zahniser. cf. Victor W. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (USA, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, n.d.), 78.

²⁸³ Agbo, *Values of Adinkra Symbols*, ix.

'bi Symbol is boldly and conspicuously displayed
on his left chest on his heart.²⁸⁴

In this illustration, the *Sumamanehene's* cloth conspicuously displays the *Obi nka 'bi* Adinkra Symbol on his left chest. I also have explained in chapter 2 how traditional Akans understand this symbol as communicating the need for coexistence. Obviously, this understanding of the need for peaceful coexistence is done without verbal communication. In fact, almost all Akan people and their chiefs use such Adinkra textile rhetoric in Ghana. The king of Asante, for instance, uses such rhetoric in his cloths, headbands, royal umbrellas, and even on some of his royal drums.

Achampong says, "Adinkra Symbols also deal with things from contemporary times to as far as hoary antiquity with insinuations."²⁸⁵ This is why it is important for an investigator to search for the story behind African symbolism. I proposed to look at some published works to substantiate this proposition. I will lead the discussion later on in this work toward the argument that the religious Adinkra Symbols, if not all of the symbols, seem to be rhetoric symbols from the historic experiences of their creators. Below, I want to consider what some scholars have said about textile rhetoric in Ghana.

Scholarly Affirmations of the Akan Cloth Rhetoric

Yankah, a communications scholar at the University of Ghana, has identified that the "use of garments as a mode of argument by women exists in most of Africa."²⁸⁶ He explained further that in Ghana, for instance, the use of garments is one of the channels of

²⁸⁴ I used this picture with the permission of Odeneko Dr. Afram Brempong III.

²⁸⁵ Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, viii.

²⁸⁶ Yankah, *Speaking for the Chief.*, 81.

communication that women “hold virtual monopoly” of. Even though a visitor to Ghana will not struggle to identify women’s use of textile rhetoric, the reality is that men also use textile rhetoric. It is possible that Yankah attributed the dominance of textile rhetoric to women in Ghana because women dominate the textile retail business in that country. Again, it is the big-time market women who largely contract the textile producing companies to produce cloth designs for them. Such “market mummies” are the ones who give the rhetoric symbolisms and names to the cloths they produce. Yankah has also gave some examples of textile rhetoric in Ghana. He has explained that people have used cloth designs to praise political heroes, commemorate historical events, and assert social identities.²⁸⁷

Rattray has also substantiated this Akan textile rhetoric. According to Rattray, the Adinkra Symbols have such rhetoric intentions even though he does not use the term “rhetoric” to refer to the communicative purposes of those cloths through Adinkra Symbols.²⁸⁸ He listed fifty-three of such Adinkra Symbols that are used for such rhetoric purposes.²⁸⁹ Rattray’s descriptions of the Adinkra Symbols bring up some important issues for attention regarding the rhetoric purposes of the Adinkra symbolizations. First, he points out that many of the Adinkra Symbols “have historical, allegorical, or magical significance.”²⁹⁰ In chapter 4, I will tell the story behind the creation of the *Gye Nyame* as the *Sumamanhene* told me, to show that symbols have historical and allegorical significance for the Akan people (see Figure 14 for the *Gye Nyame* Symbol).

²⁸⁷ Yankah., 81.

²⁸⁸ Robert. S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti.*, 264-268.

²⁸⁹ Robert. S. Rattray., 265-268.

²⁹⁰ Robert. S. Rattray., 265.



Figure 14

Gye Nyame Adinkra Symbol

It is possible, having interviewed people who have knowledge about the Adinkra Symbols, to suppose that what Rattray meant by including the historical and allegorical significances about the Adinkra Symbols was to point out that it is important for the anthropologist researching the Adinkra Symbols to realize *a priori* that dealing with those Symbols is, as Geertz acknowledges,²⁹¹ a search for meaning; and not an observation for scientific laws.²⁹² The search for meaning in cultural texts is why some scholars have noted that field study is indispensable to that search for meaning in culture. Evans-Pritchard, for instance, says that the search for meanings in cultural texts calls for living among a people in a close relationship to learn and speak their language, and to think as them regarding their concepts and feeling their values.²⁹³ What Evans-Pritchard says simply meant the need for researchers to incarnate into a peoples' cosmological understanding for themselves without imposing the outsider anthropologist's own cosmological propositions on them. Rattray, therefore, by the use of the "historical" and "allegorical" issues in his explanations of the Adinkra Symbols, intimates that the meanings of the Adinkra Symbols can properly be ascertained through a study of the histories, allegories, and myths behind them.

²⁹¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation Of Cultures* (Basic Books, 1977). cf. Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard, *Social Anthropology and Other Essays: Combining Social Anthropology and Essays in Social Anthropology* (The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), 61-62.

²⁹² Geertz, *The Interpretation Of Cultures*, 5.

²⁹³ Evans-Pritchard, *Social Anthropology and Other Essays: Combining Social Anthropology and Essays in Social Anthropology*, 61.

Secondly, Rattray argued that the Adinkra Symbols are pregnant with communications, which the Asantes/Akans decipher and understand.

The issue that the Adinkra Symbols are communication instruments means that the Adinkra Symbols are not just art pieces. They are receptacles for delivering philosophical concepts created from historical experiences of the forebearers of the Akan people. I indicated in chapter 2 that Rattray's theory about the origins of the Adinkra Symbols leaves some serious questions unanswered, and that at the same time, his theory seems to have played down the artistic intelligence and creativity of the Akan people. However, I noted that he listed some historically-significant issues for the nomenclature of the Adinkra Symbols.²⁹⁴ In agreement with Rattray, I pointed out in chapter 2 from the analysis of the data about why Nana Kwadwo Adinkra Agyeman created the *bi nka bi* and the *Gye Nyame* Adinkra Symbols, that the reasons for which the Adinkra Symbols were created was that they were intended to represent and speak from historical experiences, to serve as memory anchors, for keeping the religious experiences of the Ancestors alive for generations unborn. I will illustrate such a historical experience reason for the creation and naming of at least one of such religious Adinkra Symbols later in this chapter.

Zahniser supports this "experience is the generator of symbols" thesis, and for that reason, argues in support of the submission that the understanding of symbols has to be necessarily basic to cross-cultural discipling.²⁹⁵ Zahniser follows Peter W. Williams' work to substantiate the issue that there is a relationship between experience and symbolization. According to him, "Traditional religious believers in North America,

²⁹⁴ Robert. S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti.*, 265.

²⁹⁵ Zahniser, *Symbol and Ceremony: Making Disciples Across Cultures*, 75.

Europe, and Africa experienced religious significance and power in everyday places, persons, and events—both extraordinary and ordinary. Their experience of this significance and power in the here and now result in the generation of such symbols, enable them to cope with ... problematic persons, places and events.”²⁹⁶ It can be noted that Zahniser, like Williams, holds the view that symbols are generated from historical experiences with the aim of making them assume conceptual or philosophical insinuations, or to speak to people as sign posts or directions for good life (Turnerian). However, it is also a reality that ensuing generations of a people can also socially construct meanings of the same symbols for their context. I will discuss this further in chapter 4.

However, I recognize that the submission of Williams, which Zahniser uses, seems to elucidate only a functional significance of the symbolic. It seems that symbols do more than just that functional attribution, which Williams gives it. For instance, I hear Turner as sharing an understanding of symbols that seems to support the assertion that symbols speak deeper to issues than we sometimes expect. According to Turner, he has learned “that rituals and its symbolism are not merely epiphenomena or disguises of deeper social and psychological processes, but [that they] have ontological value.”²⁹⁷ By this clarification, Turner seems to be arguing that symbols are not necessarily vague signs or pointers to realities (maybe in the functional sense), but that the intrinsic concepts or philosophies of symbols are impregnated with symbolic reality itself for a people.

²⁹⁶ Peter W. Williams, *Popular Religion in America: Symbolic Change and the Modernization Process in Historical Perspectives*, Prentice-Hall Studies in Religion Series (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980). 64.

²⁹⁷ Victor W. Turner, *Revelation and Divination Among the Ndembu, Symbol, Myth and Ritual Series* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), 31.

Relating this understanding to the Adinkra Symbols, it may mean that the Adinkra Symbols offer the lenses in themselves for identifying what constitutes religious reality (or realities) for the Akan people. Turner's clarification, I noted from my field research, has support among the traditional understanding of the social location of Adinkra Symbols in the cosmology of the Akan people. The research officer at the Centre for National Culture in Kumasi, the *Sumamanhene*, Archbishop Sarpong, and the informants at the Ntonso Adinkra Center described the Adinkra Symbols in ways that suggested an understanding that the symbols encapsulate some of the epistemological realities for the Akan people. Therefore, if the Adinkra Symbols are religious ones, then their intended rhetoric is the description of religious realities for the Akan people. For instance, in my interviews with Archbishop Sarpong, the Ntonso respondents, and the informant at the Center for National Culture in Kumasi, they all argued that the Akans had a place for God in their cosmology before the arrival of Christian missionaries to the Gold Coast (now Ghana). Significantly, they all pointed to some of the religious symbols, especially, the *Gye Nyame* Symbol to substantiate their arguments. It seemed clear that for them the Adinkra Symbols represented religious realities and concepts, and were not just aesthetic pieces. For the research officer at the Center of National Culture in Kumasi, and the Ntonso informants, the Adinkra Symbols serve them more as religious texts. This understanding of symbols as texts has been well articulated in Karen Barber's writing.

Symbols as Texts

What are texts? Barber has noted that texts are not always letters that are formed into words, sentences, and syntaxes that carry meanings for a people. This is a good starting point for discussing symbols as texts. According to Barber:

Texts are the means by which people say things (about experience, society, the past, other people) and do things (affirm their existence, build and dismantle reputations, make demands, imagine communities, convene publics). And texts *are* also things—by which I mean that they are social and historical facts whose forms, transformation and dispersal can be studied empirically.²⁹⁸

By this comment, Barber emphasizes that text has to be identified as a means of communication, and also as the meanings makers for a people. This emphasis locates texts, not only in letters, sentences, and syntaxes, that are seen as the only issues, which are capable of transmitting meanings to or for a people. For Barber, as we can connote from the citation above, texts are things that are entextualized with meanings for a people. By entextualization, I mean, as Richard F. Young of the University of Wisconsin-Madison explains it: It is the instance where a people of a different context of “a shared social, historical, and physical context”²⁹⁹ bring their meanings to a text. As Barber puts it, “Text is differently constituted in different social and historical contexts: what a text is considered to be, how it is considered to have meaning, varies from one culture to another.”³⁰⁰ She multiplies the substantial constitutions of texts to include issues and substances by which people of oral cultures communicates and make meanings among themselves. Barber’s identification of the contextual generation of texts toward making meaning for different peoples obviously opens the door for some very important questions regarding what constitutes texts for a given people. Toward that end, Barber

²⁹⁸ Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond*, 200.

²⁹⁹ Richard F. Young, “The Entextualization of Talk” <https://english.wisc.edu/rfyoung/Entextualization.Paper.PDF> (01/23/2016). Richard Young is from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

³⁰⁰ Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond*, 67.

helps us to recognize issues that are necessary for identifying and interpreting/understanding texts. According to her, “We need to ask what kind of interpretation texts are set up to expect, and how they are considered to enter the lives of those who produce [them], receive [them] and transmit them.”³⁰¹ This is because, as she puts it, texts constitute “privileged access to other people’s experience.”³⁰² For Barber, in speaking specifically about oral texts, she says that texts are the “outcome of a concerted effort to fix words”³⁰³ for communication and meaning. Texts aim to “simultaneously conserve culture and generate new things out of it.”³⁰⁴ Barber importantly points out that one of the imports of generating texts is about the need for realities that would “outlast the here-and-now.”³⁰⁵

I noted a couple of issues within Barber's explanation of texts and their generations. First, she submits that texts do not only have contextual meanings and applications but that they are also subjective because their meanings can change when they are applied to new contexts. For that new context, the text becomes a dominant issue for making meaning for a people of that context when they generally accept what the text is supposed to mean for them. Williams explains the issue that a broken mirror is interpreted as a bad omen, but that does not mean that particular interpretation is held universally, but rather that it is limited in its significant application maybe, to particular cultural locations or contexts.³⁰⁶ Therefore, something that does not communicate

³⁰¹ Barber., 67.

³⁰² Barber., 103.

³⁰³ Barber., 67.

³⁰⁴ Barber., 68.

³⁰⁵ Barber., 67-68

³⁰⁶ Williams, *Popular Religion in America: Symbolic Change and the Modernization Process in Historical Perspectives*, 8.

religious significance in one cultural setting may have the possibility of acquiring such religious significance in another cultural setting. This becomes especially so if the said text is interpreted in ways that are part of the wider religious symbolic system for that people.³⁰⁷

Adinkra Symbols as Texts

The religious Adinkra Symbols, in that understanding, are texts. This is because, as noted in chapter 2, they were created to embody the religious significance of historical experiences for their creators in their immediate contexts, and to also transmit such broad religious understanding among the Akan people in future generations.³⁰⁸ For instance, when an Akan chief in traditional dressing wraps a piece of cloth with the Symbol *Nyame biribi wɔ soro na ma me nsa nka* (“God, you have something, some blessing, in the sky for me today; let me receive it) printed in it around himself, traditional Akans read a religious communication about the providence of God in that symbolic action. However, that may, at best, be appreciated only for its aesthetic values if that same chief was to appear in a different cultural context. The Akan people will be reading a “text,” in that adornment of the chief, but this “text” will not communicate to them via sentences, grammars, syntaxes, and so on. It will be an oral text that communicates deep philosophies, proverbs, metaphors, morality, faithfulness, and so on, through the symbolic.³⁰⁹ Turner argues:

If the investigator is well acquainted with the common idiom in which a society expresses such emotions as friendship, love, hate, joy, sorrow, contentment, and fear, he cannot fail to observe that these are experienced

³⁰⁷ Williams, 8.

³⁰⁸ Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts*, 67-68

³⁰⁹ See Adu-Gyamrah, “Daily Graphic, March 16, 2016.” Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts*, 67-68

in ritual situations ... often by the performance of instrumentally symbolic behavior.³¹⁰

Turner's list of emotions omitted religion; however, the addition of the religion would have strengthened the list all the more instead of weakening his argument. In the same understanding, I submit that if an investigator is conversant with the Adinkra Symbols, he or she will quickly identify that when an Akan chief or queen-mother wears the cloth of the *Nyame biribi wɔ soro na ma me nsa nka*," he or she is religiously communicating.

The understanding above is part of the reasons why the research officer at the Center for National Culture in Kumasi said "we do not need any written thesis to proof that we have known God all along, the Adinkra Symbols speak that reality louder than any written book can do. Therefore, if anybody anywhere thinks that we are oral people, so there is no way we keep a record of the knowledge God, it's their own problem. That's all I can say."³¹¹ Archbishop Emeritus Sarpong, in that same understanding, argues, "The Adinkra Symbols were not our attempts at developing a writing system. Why do we need a writing system? That is not the only way of keeping knowledge. They were symbols for communication, just that."³¹²

Second, Barber says that people create texts extemporary and improvisatorially from existing resources. Barber's submission seems to have support and an example in H. W. Turner's anthropological ontology, which explains that when human beings have encountered the divine, they create symbols or texts from their world to keep the memory of the experience beyond the here-and-now.³¹³ For the Akan therefore, some of the

³¹⁰ Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, 39.

³¹¹ Research Officer, Adinkra Interview at the Center for National Culture, Kumasi.

³¹² Sarpong, Interview on the Religious and Social Significance of the Adinkra Symbols.

³¹³ Turner, "A Model for the Structure of Religion in Relation to the Secular.", 42.

symbols are carriers of historical experiences, and that when one encounters a symbol, he or she may have to understand that he or she is encountering a whole history of a previous or an earlier experience. Such historical experiences and the lessons from them are what culturally-identifiable people try to immortalize in their cultural and historical context through particular symbolizations as memory anchors. Therefore, the appropriate investigative probe will have to try to identify the myth or the sacred story behind the symbol. The sacred stories behind symbols are the means to opening up the meanings of religious symbols. For that reason, if anybody ever wants to understand the communication of those symbolic texts, it is extremely important for them to get to the sacred stories behind the symbols.

Third, Barber's explanations intimate the need for texts to be given a period of growing to become "dominant"³¹⁴ or concerted texts over time. One of the important issues about Barber's description of texts, as I have hinted earlier, is the issue that it opens the understanding of texts to some wider inclusive issues. Barber's submission broadens the meaning of a text beyond that which is written or that which is seen. Her proposal about entextualization, which she explains as the bringing together of texts into a new text, suggests that texts can be taken out of their context and given new meaning in a new context.

The understanding of texts as inclusive of other issues apart from what is written means that things like art pieces, dance forms, drumming, silence, and even wailing can be forms of texts. It is from that inclusive understanding of texts that we can and have to refer to the Adinkra Symbols as texts for the Akan people. Therefore, the religious

³¹⁴ I am using "Dominant" here in the understanding, which Zahniser and Hiebert use it. See, Zahniser, *Symbol and Ceremony: Making Disciples Across Cultures*, 78.

Adinkra Symbols are religious symbolic texts for the Akan people. As texts, we have to consider the Adinkra Symbols as sharing in the identified attributes of texts, as Barber pointed out. For instance, for Barber, texts have the dynamic tension of the need to keep the historical cultural experiences on the one side, as well as the need to do new things with them on the other.³¹⁵ The Adinkra Symbols have the same dynamic tension. The stories about them show that they were or are supposed to serve as the reminders of the historical experiences of the Ancestors of the Akan people who created those symbols. However, their meanings or significance are also intended to be the issues for dealing with new challenges as the Akan people come to face them in their future lives as a people.³¹⁶

In the months leading up to the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections in Ghana, and even in months following the declaration of the results for the National Democratic Congress Party in Ghana, extreme social tension brewed in the nation. People were so afraid that Ghana was going to be plunged into a civil war. In those unpredictable days, the *Obi nka 'bi* Symbol became the “olive branch” that the media houses waved to Ghanaians in the search for sustaining the peace for that country. The *Obi nka 'bi* Symbol has become significant and relevant for the modern Ghanaian. Ghanaians drew from that symbolic text, which Nana Adinkra created from a historical experience, and continued to use it in contemporary times for dealing with new forms of tension even in a twenty-first-century Ghana. Ghana has a minority population who are not Akans or who do not speak the Akan language however, with time, the *Obi nka 'bi* Symbol has become a dominant

³¹⁵ Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond*, 67-68.

³¹⁶ Nana Kusi Buachi alias Odeneho Dr. Afram Brempong III, History of the Adinkra Symbols.

symbol in Ghana because the average Ghanaian understands the connotations of that text now.

Some Adinkra Symbols as Religious Texts

In the understanding that symbols can be texts, I referred to Adinkra symbols, especially the religious ones, as religious texts because they were generated from historical religious experiences with the aim of preserving those experiences of the forebearers of the Akan people beyond their historical settings.

The question then is: If the Adinkra Symbols are texts, what type of meaning do they transmit? I will be engaging this question soon. However, before then, we also have to ask if those meaning are going to be constant. This latter question will engage my attention in chapter 4, where I will attempt a discussion of how the Adinkra Symbols, for instance, have been entextualized through different historical context of the Akans.

Meanings of Some of the Adinkra Symbols

Victor Turner follows Susanne Langer³¹⁷ to propose three locations for meaning. According to Turner, “‘Meaning’ has at least three aspects: signification, denotation, and connotation.”³¹⁸ He says that signification describes the relationship between a symbol or sign and its object for a subject.³¹⁹ Accordingly, it can be said that a symbol as a sign points to its object and that object alone. When a signboard is erected to point visitors to the location of a school, it does only that. A sign or symbol points a subject to something out of itself that is more important for the subject. Denotation, according to Turner,

³¹⁷ Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (U.S.A: Harvard University Press, 1958), 59.

³¹⁸ Turner, *Revelation and Divination Among the Ndembu, Symbol, Myth and Ritual Series* 162-163.

³¹⁹ Turner., 162.

describes “a complex relationship which a name has to an object which bears it”³²⁰ In the denotative type of relationship, a name or a symbol points to something substantial and concrete like the name of a person, for example, Kofi. Denotatively, Kofi among Akans will refer to the person whom people know bears that name, or many other known Kofis. Turner says that “the more direct relationship of the name, or symbol, to its associated concept is its connotation.”³²¹ Connotation is about the secondary meaning a symbol or a reality evokes for the person(s) who experiences the reality. For instance, among Akans the name Kofi is the name of a person primarily, however, its connotative implication are a “male gender,” or “a male person born on Friday.” Even though we may know who Kofi is because Kofi is a person that we know bears that name—maybe by the circumstances of his birth, or simply as the name given him in his christening. Such a referent to Kofi as a known person will only be denotative. However, the connotative implication of that same name, Kofi, moves directly beyond Kofi just as the name of a person, to realities like “a male gender” or “a person born on a Friday who is male.”³²² The meanings, which realities, as connotative symbols communicate, differ from one context to the other, in the sense that it describes a direct relationship of a name or symbol to its associated concepts, which can be explained to mean more than one reality for people in different historical and cultural contexts. For instance, it is possible to encounter a Kofi who is a woman among some tribes in Ghana. Such a female with the name Kofi could have ascended to a stool that is for chiefs (males, and not for queenmothers), which bear the stool name Kofi. Again, the connotative implications of a

³²⁰ Turner., 162.

³²¹ Turner., 161-162

³²² Turner., 162.

symbol are not only evoked for a people only when the particular symbols are present. For such a reason, Turner further explains, “the connotation remains with the symbols even when the object of its denotation is neither present nor looked for.”³²³

Thus, we can say that denotations are about a name or a symbol’s relationship to one object or subject, and do not go beyond that object, while connotations have elastic stretching that enables it to have relationship with different secondary or deeper concepts for subjects.³²⁴ Symbols with such elastic properties are what Perrin refers to as “tensive symbols.” As Perrin explains, “[A symbol] can have a set of meanings that can neither be exhausted nor adequately expressed by one referent, in which case it is “tensive” symbol.”³²⁵ Significantly, the connotative meaning of symbols, unlike the denotative meanings, is not apathetic. They are able to elicit emotive, behavioral, and even ethical responses, owing to the issue that they evoke the understandings of concepts, mythical narratives, and emotion-arousing historical narratives, which are able to provoke emotional reactions for a people. The Adinkra Symbols have such connotative meanings. As Archbishop Sarpong explains, “The Adinkra Symbols are extensively used to express the feelings and sentiments that one may be undergoing at a particular moment.”³²⁶ What Sarpong seems to be saying is that the Adinkra Symbols are not only aesthetic pieces of art; but that they have connotative communications as well—and the latter is more important if they are evaluated on a scale of valuation. The following story is an illustration.

³²³ Turner., 162-163.

³²⁴ Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 17th edition (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 1986), 149-151.

³²⁵ Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, 29-30.

³²⁶ Peter Akwasi Sarpong, “Foreword” in, Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, v.

Nana Bonsu, my great-great maternal uncle, who died about three decades ago, and with whom I lived part of my life as a boy, was discussing a case with some royal family members from Ehwimase, one of our towns. The case was about a disputed ownership of the Ehwimase lands. The then-chief of Dumanafa had claimed that the Ehwimase stool lands belonged to the Dumanafa stool and that the Dumanafa stool gave the people of Ehwimase their lands. Nana Bonsu said that English Governor Fuller judged a similar case for the people of Ehwimase. As he narrated the history of the land and the litigation, he mentioned how some decades before the Fuller case almost all the males of the Ehwimase royal family died within some forty days.

According to Nana Bonsu, one of our great-great Ancestors, Nana Adu Panpankwa, as it was the practice in those years, consulted a traditional priest about the cause of the deaths of the males of the Aduana royal family of Ehwimase. Nana Bonsu said that the traditional priest revealed that the cause of the death had to do with litigation over the Ehwimase lands in those earlier years of the royal family's life on that land. He told the Ehwimase royal family members who had visited him about how the traditional priest had required the sacrifice of one of the royal virgin girls by smashing her head against a palm tree at Ehwimase for the dying of our men to stop. As soon as Nana Bonsu mentioned the sacrifice of the virgin royal girl, and showed us where that particular palm tree was at Ehwimase, tears started forming in his eyes. He then asked me to bring him a bottle of Schnapps. The mood in the room changed as the elders helped themselves to glasses of Schnapps. Maybe I was too young to understand why the elders became sad and why Nana Bonsu shed tears. However, I now understand how the deep symbolisms of the story of the sacrificed virgin girl and the palm tree relived the emotions about

sacrifice for them.

If an observer does not put on the lenses of “thick description” for drinking Schnapps (an alcoholic drink, which is used in traditional settings for pouring libations to the gods and the Ancestors), he or she may consider it as an act of hospitality—for Akans sometimes serve liquor as part of being hospitable. However, with the lenses of “thick description,”³²⁷ the sharing of drinking Schnapps communicated deeper emotive issues in this instance. Akans also deal with issues that generate difficult emotional reactions in people, like the death of loved ones, or calamities by drinking liquor. Therefore, in this sharing of Schnapps, my elders were trying to deal with the deep emotional stress that the memory of the sacrificed virgin girl evoked in them.

Symbolic historical narratives/myths like Nana Bonsu’s are able to transport elders and chiefs into the history of their Ancestors and enable them to participate in those histories.

In that understanding, and on a positive note, a connotative meaning is an active elicitor of transformative or motivated responses. As Turner argues, “It has long been recognized in anthropological literature that ritual symbols are stimuli of emotion.”³²⁸

We can draw an illustration from the story of the obviously-embittered divorced wife with whom I started this chapter. In that story, the rhetoric of the black-and-white Adinkra cloth she wore to the funeral of her ex-father-in-law was surely going to evoke some form of response to the Adinkra rhetoric of her cloth. The wearing of that insinuating cloth could have made the husband so ashamed or so angry that if he had not controlled himself, he could have driven his ex-wife away from his father’s funeral.

³²⁷ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 6-7.

³²⁸ Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, 29.

However, a different person could have worn the same cloth to Church on a Sunday, and the connotative meaning would have been rhetoric of praise or thanksgiving to God for God's providence and sustenance.

We can, therefore, look at the Adinkra Symbols in one of the character attributions that Turner accords symbols. Turner identifies that symbols have unification properties, meaning that they can be representative of many different objects for different subjects under the category of that symbolism.³²⁹ In that sense, the Adinkra Symbols as texts also transmit multivocal meanings. Again, in Turner's polarization categorization, symbols like the Adinkra Symbols have polarization properties. The Adinkra Symbols, as noted in my illustrations above, touch on senses of people who understand them, and at the same time, direct the people ideologically.

We have to point out that as texts, the Adinkra Symbols sometimes communicate prescriptive meanings. Sometimes, their rhetoric communicates issues for dealing with concerns in the future. Such meanings can communicate proactive issues, which can either forestall disaster or ensure good life for the people for whom that symbol has become a dominant one. For instance, we know that the traffic light was created from experiences of past encounters or happenings and that they were created for ensuring that traffic is managed efficiently. Prescriptive symbols are the ones that take experiences from the past to build remedies for the future. An Adinkra Symbol that would be one of such prescriptive symbols is the *Wo foro duapa a na ye pia wo* (meaning, "people will give you the push you need if they see that you are climbing a good tree, that is one that will benefit society in general") symbol.

³²⁹ Turner., 28.

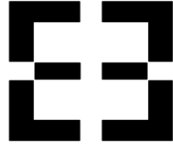


Figure 15

Woforo duapa a na ye pia wo: This symbol evokes motivation in people to pursue issues, which will be beneficial to their societies if they ever want to receive any support/commendation from the people of their communities.

Among the Akans, the meaning of symbols can also be a communication of hope. Sometimes symbols transmit the ideation that though the current situation or setting is bad, if we hold on, there is a person or a catalyst who or which can make things good for us as desired in the future. Examples of the Adinkra Symbols of hope are the *Nyame nnwu na mawu* (literally, “God does not die so I will not die”).



Figure 16

“Nyame nnwu na m’awu”

and *Nyame biribi wɔ Soro na ma me nsa nka* (literally, “God, you have something, some blessing, in the sky for me today; let me receive it”) symbols.



Figure 17

Nyame biribi wɔ Soro [na ma me nsa nka] Symbol

Toward Identifying the Meaning of the Adinkra Symbolic Text

Pobee contends that African culture itself is hermeneutic.³³⁰ The introduction to the works of Kwame Bediako Hans Visser and Gillian Bediako resonates the same observation:

African theology charts its own distinctive course, because African religious experience and heritage, referred to by the generic term 'primal religion', provide the substratum. Africa has had its own knowledge of God. The post-missionary church, following Western missionary attitudes, did not pay much attention to this initially.³³¹

The question then becomes that if African primal or folk culture is hermeneutics, then what type of hermeneutic procedure or method will be required to get to the theological messages, which are impregnated in African primal or folk cultures? Paul, in the Bible, seems to provide a paradigm, which seems helpful in that search. In his encounter with the people of Lystra and Derbe,³³² Paul makes some intimations and affirmations. The first affirmation is that God has among all peoples, issues, which theologians can use to point a people to the salvation of those people and their cultures. We cannot help but refer to these pre-Christian historical experiences of people as issues of *preparatio evangelica* for the peoples.

The second intimation of Paul is that missionary theologians have to look for appropriate procedures or methods to use as connecting rods between the historical-experiences created cultures of the people, and the needed continuity with the Gospel in particular, and contextual theologies in general for the peoples they come to. If mission

³³⁰ John S. Pobee, "Bible Study in Africa: A Passover of Language.," *Semeia* 73, January 1, 1996, 161–79.

³³¹ Hans Visser and Gillian Bediako, "Introduction" in, Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: The History and Experience* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), loc. 207.

³³² Acts 14:8-18.

has the objective of transformation, then, as Vinay Samuel says, two issues are important: First, mission has to be a journey with a people in their context. Vinay points out that the Christian faith has to be contextual as well.³³³ Walls submits that the Christian faith is both translatable for that contextualization purpose, as well as having serialized versions of the faith for ensuring that the faith lives on to be transmitted to all generations.³³⁴ In addition, according to Walls, Christianity translates itself “through the structures by which people perceive and recognize their world,” and he further points out that these structures are not the same for all peoples.³³⁵ All these mean that missionaries have to look for issues that constitute *preparatio evangelica* as the starting point for missional theologies. Paul, in the Bible, does something similar in his encounter with the people of Lystra and Derbe, and also with the people of Athens.³³⁶

I propose that we look at the Adinkra Symbols as issues similar to the altars Paul identified in his rounds in Athens. Surely, that approach will help toward identifying the theological persuasions of the Akan people of Ghana. These symbols, as I have intimated earlier, have stories behind them. To get to their significant meaning, therefore, requires getting to know the stories the symbols represent. As Eloise Meneses and his colleagues in the “Forum on Theory in Anthropology” affirmed, “all understanding is achieved by an interpretive process conducted against the background of a narrative, or “framing

³³³ Vinay Samuel, “Mission as Transformation,” in *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of the Whole Gospel* (WIPF & STOCK Publishers, 2008), 229, 522.

³³⁴ Samuel. Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, 1st edition (Maryknoll, N.Y. : Edinburgh: Orbis Books, 1996), 22-23.

³³⁵ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 24.

³³⁶ Acts 17:16-31.

story.”³³⁷ Meneses and his colleagues further submit, “In the context of lived communities, these narratives produce plausibility structures rendering the world comprehensible and meaningful.”³³⁸ This submission agrees with my proposition that we can route our search for meaning in symbols through the historical stories they represent.

Next, we begin the search for the meaning of the Adinkra Symbols by using our tool for searching for meaning in the labyrinth of the web of significance, which Akans have spun around themselves,³³⁹ The Adinkra ethnohermeneutics. For an explanation of the Adinkra ethnohermeneutics approach, Larry W. Caldwell's propositions about ethnohermeneutics will cast some necessary light on the issues I tried to explicate here.

In a paper, he presented at the 2017 Evangelical Missiological Society National Conference, he explained that ethnohermeneutics is:

Bible interpretation done in cross-cultural and multi-generational contexts that, whenever possible, uses culturally appropriate dynamic hermeneutical method already in place in the culture; the primary goal being to interpret the Bible, as well as to communicate the truths of the Bible, in ways that will be best understood from within the worldview of the receptor culture.³⁴⁰

Some key issues of Caldwell's definition of ethnohermeneutics are informative and do not have to be glossed over. The definition presumes that cultures around the world are pregnant with issues that may constitute methods for interpreting the Bible in ways that will make the Bible understandable for the local people.³⁴¹ In another publication, Caldwell argues that ethnohermeneutics does not have to strictly follow

³³⁷ Eloise Meneses et al., “Forum on Theory in Anthropology ‘Engaging the Religiously Committed Other: Anthropologists and Theologians in Dialogue,’” *Current Anthropology* 55, no. 1 (February 2014): 82–104.

³³⁸ Meneses et al., 83

³³⁹ Geertz, *The Interpretation Of Cultures*, 5.

³⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 2.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2

Western philosophy's child, which he refers to as the historical-critical two-step approach,³⁴² which Osborne refers to as diachronic investigations and synchronic applications.³⁴³ Caldwell argues that the semiotic type of ethnohermeneutics, which this dissertation largely employs, "has little need for the historical-critical method."³⁴⁴ As I mentioned in chapter 1, the symbolic hermeneutics, like all symbols, enjoys the condensation character, it is not very worried about the insertions of personal opinions so long as they are derived from Bible story symbolisms. The understanding and allowance that ethnohermeneutics accords people of different cultures is extremely significant.

As an Akan African whose world is saturated with symbolisms, I approach an understanding of the Bible (or hermeneutics) with a symbolic search. For African Christians, the Bible is not the word of God as independent of God. It is God's word that He watches over to perform (Jer. 1:12). The proverb "a man is as his word" explains that the truthfulness or otherwise of a person is in how that person keeps his or her word with integrity. For African Christians, the Bible itself is symbolic of God's faithfulness and ability to fulfill His promises for those who trust Him. I have seen African Christian parents open to a verse of God's protection and place it on a newborn baby's pillow. This practice owes itself to the belief that the words of the Bible are God's words, which He will surely fulfill over the baby against the attacks of witches, demons, and evil spirits who might want to destroy the baby in Akan cosmology. God watches over His word to perform is affirmed in Psalm 138:2 where the psalmist says, "I will worship toward thy

³⁴² Larry W., "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics: Re-Evaluating New Testament Hermeneutical Models for Intercultural Bible Interpreters Today."

³⁴³ Grant R Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (USA: IVP, 1991), 40, 265.

³⁴⁴ Larry W., "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics: Re-Evaluating New Testament Hermeneutical Models for Intercultural Bible Interpreters Today."

holy temple, and praise thy name for thy loving-kindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.”

My Akan Orientation and Bible Translation

For Akans, the stories of the Bible significantly point to issues about Yahweh who has finally revealed Himself in His Son, Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1–3a; John 1:14; 2 Pet. 1:17; Col. 1:27) for cosmic salvation (2 Cor. 5:19–21; 1 Pet. 1:18–20). Salvation has the purpose of fulfilling Yahweh’s plan of the adoption of Gentiles (1 Pet. 2:9–10; Eph. 1:1–14, 2:4–22) into His purposed cosmopolitan and egalitarian human family covenant. God initially cut a covenant with Abraham for all human beings (Gen. 12:1–3; compare Rev. 7:9), and which He has brought to fulfillment in His Son, Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:26–29). The stories of the Bible are therefore not necessarily issues that have to be subjected to historical-criticisms before they make meaning for my context. The biblical stories are more of typologies and symbolism³⁴⁵ for making it possible for Akan people to identify God and His activities in history. Typologies identify the metaphorical stories behind scriptural narratives and relate them to contemporary challenges affecting humans and human needs in historical contexts. Again, typologies proceed on the recognition that the stories of the Bible are metaphorical realities that tell about the character of Yahweh. The stories tell about Yahweh’s salvation and about how He has worked it out. They tell about His expectations of His faithful children, how He wants them to be living and serving Him, and how He wants them to relate to Him and relate to other human beings. From this typological, metaphorical, and symbolic approach to biblical narratives, I have

³⁴⁵ Larry W., 321.

a thematic theological approach to biblical interpretation/hermeneutics. For an African of the symbolic world, hermeneutics has to be metaphorically symbolic and typological.

What I mean is that when I read the salvation history of Yahweh in the Bible, I identify a theme of Yahweh's unequalled sovereignty and faithfulness. I identify these not through the historical-critical approach. They come to me through the symbols I identify in the Bible stories.

In the October 11, 2017, publication of Seedbed,³⁴⁶ the writer was speaking about the meaning of suffering as Paul uses it in Colossians 1:24. According to the writer, Paul meant:

The Gospel moves on the muscles of love, and the muscles of love grow through acts of un-self-interested giving, a.k.a. Suffering. By suffering, I don't mean a grit your teeth and bear it kind of activity but a gladly putting others first kind of activity. When suffering is done with love it does not feel like suffering but like joy. Hence, Paul rejoices!³⁴⁷

The writer's (the one who wrote the Seedbed devotional that I have cited above) familiarity with American culture, in which people relatively do not experience physical suffering as we do in Africa, makes him paint an esoteric picture of suffering in philosophical terms. He sees suffering as an elective and voluntarily "un-self-interested giving," and not the physical suffering, which produces the gritting of teeth. An African in whose background are stories and experiences of real suffering of hunger, physical abuse, and political and ecclesiastical abuse can easily identify with Paul's suffering as inclusive of physical suffering for the Christian faith. The African is able to do this not from historical-critical investigations, but from the stories that Paul himself shares in the

³⁴⁶ "Seedbed" is a devotional publication of Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore Kentucky.

³⁴⁷ "Seedbed, online publication, visited on 09/11/2017 at 8:45 am.

Bible as God's allotment with the ministry the Lord has given him—a summation of which is in 1 Corinthians 11:23–29:

Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?³⁴⁸

These stories are symbolic and they communicate to me, an African, a paradigm of the Christian life. In these stories, I see symbolic communications of what it may mean for me to be a Christian. The symbolic stories make meaning for me. Therefore, when I come to the Bible, I search for stories as symbols and then identify the stories behind the Adinkra Symbols as communicating the similar issues about God. The *Gye Nyame* Symbol communicates the faithfulness and sovereignty of God. The *Owuo kumm Nyame* Symbol communicates the death of Jesus, who is God to me as a Christian. The Akan, therefore, does not strictly need philosophical historical-critical tools for knowledge and the declaration of his understanding of God as Caldwell contends in his ethnohermeneutics proposals.

³⁴⁸ Compare stories of suffering for the Christian faith of Peter in 1 Peter 4:12-19, James' and Peter's story in Acts 12.

Yahweh's Character as the Stories of the Bible Tell

In the Bible, I read about God's assignment to Abraham, which even in its original declaration included the ultimate salvation of all ethnicities (Gen. 12:3). I also read the obvious fulfillment of that promise in the great salvation and the presence of the Church in Africa. I see Yahweh as not only the God whose plans included saving me and my Ancestors, but I also see that Yahweh is neither racist nor upholds one race as greater and superior to any other race. The Bible becomes relevant for me as an African theologian because these are the realities I want a universal God to address for me. I want to find my place in God's love and salvation economy and not philosophical historical-criticisms with regard to whether the *Koine* Greek in a biblical text is too high for John to have been able to write. I read the Bible to identify symbols of God's actions in favor of those who trusted Him, and how He always enables those who are oppressed. The story of Daniel is symbolic of the God who may overturn the rulings of powerful ruler to vindicate those who trust Him. These symbolisms enable me to build faith in the God of the Bible and also expect Him to act on behalf of my people for our salvation and ultimate vindication.

For me, an Akan, hermeneutics is not a two-step process as Daniel Tappeiner contends against Caldwell in his "A Response to Caldwell's Trumpet Call to Ethnohermeneutics:"

Hermeneutics is usually defined as a two-step process in modern times. The first step is concerned with what the writer of the text "meant" by what he wrote. The second step is concerned with what it "means," here and now in our various cultures and stages of human consciousness. We have come to describe the inter-relation between these two steps as the "hermeneutical spiral, or helix." It is a complex process of refinement, allowing human beings to grasp more and more accurately, what an

ancient text meant, in its own terms and what it now means to humankind in its present state of consciousness.”³⁴⁹

I contend that the two-step model is not only an imposition but that it also breaks the necessary continuation that I think I have to maintain with how God has revealed Himself to my great-grandparents for my benefit. My Ancestors encountered the activities of God, albeit, with shallow understandings of His ways in most cases, but they acknowledged these activities of God well enough to create Adinkra Symbols to represent them for the benefit of my generation and those who will come after ours. Why should I ignore these symbols for categories that I find extremely difficult to comprehend? I am in no way suggesting that the route from the Adinkra-facilitated hermeneutics to Adinkra-facilitated theology is easier. I am only suggesting that the search is never for philosophical or scientific principles of interpretation, but that it is a search for theological meaning in the cultural web of significance, which my Ancestors have woven in symbolisms as memory anchors with the aim of introducing God to their generations after them.

This search for religious meaning requires an anthropological research, as I mentioned in chapter 1. I mentioned that the anthropological interpreter will have to use facilities like field research, relevant published literature, physically-historical pieces of evidence—which have survived the times for substantiations—and the stories or myths, which his or her informants will tell him or her. After all, as Hiebert explains when commenting on the different attempt to discover meaning, meaning lies in the story told

³⁴⁹ DANIEL A. Tappeiner, “A Response To Caldwell’s Trumpet Call To Ethnohermeneutics,” *Bernardbragas (Online)*, July 5, 2008. Visited on July 12, 2017, at 2:00 pm.

about an issue.³⁵⁰ My tools for hermeneutics is going to be clearly different from the tools that the person engaged in the historical-critical hermeneutics will use. The latter will require Bible dictionaries, commentaries, Bible atlases, and the knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew languages.

Again, as I indicated in chapter 1, the field research for the Adinkra hermeneutics will require data from both the literate and non-literate informants. The strength of taking and analyzing data from both sources as objectively as possible will provide the person who is doing the Adinkra hermeneutics with a more plausible original meaning of the Adinkra Symbols. The issue of getting to the meaning of the Adinkra Symbols for earlier generations of Akans will be extremely important for ensuring that there is not an over-the-limit entextualization in the original meaning of the text when he or she tries to identify meanings for dealing with contemporary contexts.

The one doing the Adinkra hermeneutics has to recognize that he or she also has the responsibility as an anthropological interpreter of allowing the Spirit of God to direct him or her toward identifying messages in the Bible for dialoguing with meaning or communication from the symbolic search. In Ghanaian Christianity, if the confirmation of the acquired meaning does not have a biblical support, it will risk the possibility of people seeing it as anti-Christian. For instance, in the Ayigya focus group interaction, which included professors who are Christians, and therefore constituted literate informants, there was the insistence on text-proving whatever I propose for the Adinkra hermeneutics with biblical supports. The only woman in the group, for instance, told me that without the confirmations from biblical texts, anything I will be teaching from the

³⁵⁰ Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 205. Emphasis mine.

Adinkra Symbols will not really be Christian (and by biblical she meant texts from the Bible which support the issues I discuss); all the members of the group agreed with her. I agree with the Ayigya focus group that the supremacy of the Bible should never be sacrificed on the altar of ethnotheological constructions. Adinkra Symbols ethnotheology do not have to interpret Scripture. It is Scripture that has to interpret the Adinkra ethnotheological propositions—even more, relevant traditions of the Church in the past and in contemporary times and spaces have to be in dialogue with every form of Adinkra theological issuance and be critically, evaluated by same before particular Adinkra ethnotheological proposals find acceptance with Akan Church communities. The reason for such critical evaluation of the Adinkra ethnotheological proposals is why the literate, informed focus group proposal and engagement is extremely important.

In Ghana's Christianity, Bible text-proving occupies a big space as a yard stick for measuring what is Christian and what is not. The Bible text-proving approach has a long root to the type of Missionary and Scripture Union (SU) Christianity, which has heavily, informed biblical teaching in the Churches. Bible text-proving has settled so well with a large number of Ghanaian Christians that the introduction of symbolic and ethnohermeneutical theology will meet some challenges, even though it is the type of theology that will settle well with the oral-literate people, which Ghanaians are. Therefore, to get to an objective analysis of Adinkra texts and the possible applications for contemporary contexts will require a hermeneutic community of literate and non-literate informants, which I proposed in chapter 1 as the focus groups.

Summary

I submitted that the Adinkra Symbols rhetoric. I showed the processes for identifying the meanings of the Adinkra symbolic rhetoric, and the precautions that are necessary for realizing the meanings of the messages of the Adinkra Symbols for anthropological theologizations for peoples. I have submitted that an investigation of the cultural and historical stories of the people can facilitate the need to understand the rhetoric of the symbols of a people. By that generalized approach, I have suggested how the religious connotative meanings of the Adinkra Symbols can be realized toward the understanding of the religious persuasions of the Akan people. I have also argued that the process should not end with the realization of the religious understanding via a people's symbolisms, but that through a hermeneutic community, the issues realized from the search for meaning should be placed within the revelations of God for building an anthropological theology for particular peoples who own the symbols. It seems necessary to conclude this chapter by the illustration of the *Gye Nyame* Adinkra Symbol.

The Creation of the *Gye Nyame* Symbol



Figure 18

The *Gye Nyame*” Symbol: The final decision is with God
[and not humans].

The *Gye Nyame*” Symbol has been variously interpreted as “except God,” “only God,” and “the final decision is with God, [and not human].” It seems to me, as an emic interpreter, who has been told the story behind the creation of that particular symbol, that

the most appropriate interpretation is the “the final decision is with God, [and not human]” translation. The paramount chief of the Suma Traditional Area informed me that from the Suntreso war with the Kwamanhene through the six wars with the Asantes, the Gyamans were never defeated. They never became a vassal kingdom to the Asante Kingdom.

The Gyamans believed that the Supreme Being/God was the one who protected them. Through this attribution to God’s protection, for their safekeeping in those highly risky migrations in the virgin forests of the middle belts of Ghana in those ages, as well as the many diseases that threatened to obliterate their existence, the Gyamans realized that the only person who had saved them through it all was Nyankopon. He was the Supreme God of heaven, who is without comparison, and whose name is sometimes shortened to Nyame. The Ancestors realized this and started affirming the unparalleled greatness of God because they experienced the demonstrated unequalled power of Nyame through how He had protected them. The experience of the protecting power of God is part of the myth behind the *Gye Nyame* Symbol. The attribution of their protection to God—the same God of the Bible does not have to be regarded with skepticisms for as I argued in the last chapter, the Akan people had had a long historical relationship with God. Robert Rattray, the British anthropologist who worked among the Akans of Ghana in the first decades of the twentieth century, pointed out that the Supreme Being of the Asantes, and for that matter, the Akans, is the same Jehovah of the Bible.³⁵¹

The *Gye Nyame* Symbol was created to tell their story of survival in fatal contexts and situations because of the gracious and merciful safekeeping of Nyame (God). The

³⁵¹ R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1923), 13.

Gye Nyame Symbol was therefore meant to share their experiences with their unborn children for all the years to come and to also transmit the faith, which evolved out of God's faithful and gracious safekeeping of the Ancestors of the Akan people with the unborn generations of the Akan people. As such a faith symbolization, the *Gye Nyame* Adinkra Symbols was meant to also call unborn generations of first the Gyamans, and later when it became a dominant symbol, all the Akans, to trust in the all-powerful God of heaven, Nyankopɔn. When the *Sumamanhene* said that the Adinkra Symbol exudes and highlights the philosophical underpinnings of traditional cultural belief among the Akan people, which includes the existence and supremacy/sovereignty of God,³⁵² he surely meant that to include not only the *Gye Nyame* Adinkra Symbol but others as well.³⁵³ Willis might have shared that understanding of the Adinkra Symbols when he said that the symbol communicates “the omnipotence, omnipresence, and immortality of God.”³⁵⁴ In that symbol, the Akan people confess a faith that communicates an issue of faith that says, “Except God, I fear none.”³⁵⁵

We have to note that the story surrounding the creation of the popular *Gye Nyame* Symbol illustrates further for our understanding of the historical experience-based origins of the Adinkra Symbols. We find it interesting to note that the *Gye Nyame* Symbol was created from two traditional clubs with something in between them, which keeps them from crushing each other. The symbol intimates that there may be danger all around; however, if anybody takes shelter in the reality holding them apart that person will not be crushed. I take that reality holding the clubs apart to be God. It communicates God's

³⁵² Daily Graphic, loc. cit.

³⁵³ Adu-Gyamerah, “Daily Graphic, March 16, 2016.”

³⁵⁴ Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary*, 114.

³⁵⁵ Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary: A Visual Primer on the Language of Adinkra.*, 114.

protection and assures that people who have their trust in God will always be protected and kept from being crushed by whatever enemy. The message seems clear so long as God has not given up on a person or people, nobody can crush or obliterate them. As Willis explains:

“‘Except God’ simply means that one recognizes the supremacy of God and, in essence, one is not afraid of anything – except the Supreme Being.”³⁵⁶

This connotative understanding of the *Gye Nyame* Symbol brings up the idea that the *Gye Nyame* Symbol was created from the experience of God as a memorial piece. The *Gye Nyame* Symbol, in particular, was created to evoke faith in God, even in unborn generations of the Gyamans. The creator of the Symbol and the succeeding generation of Gyamans who will come to know this Symbol will use it to share in the faith of their Ancestors.

The symbol *Gye Nyame*,” like all the others, is a door that opens to the Akan people’s understanding of not just the existence of God, but also of the supremacy and sovereignty of God for the semiotician or ethnographic enquirer. In many contexts in contemporary Ghana, people still affirm this basic traditional understanding of the *Gye Nyame* Symbol. In my research at the Center for National Culture in Kumasi, as I mentioned earlier, said that the “‘Gye Nyame’ of the Akans shows that we know and put our trust in the sovereignty of God. It is our way of affirming that without God’s approval nobody and nothing can destroy us.” Therefore, the *Gye Nyame* Symbol on Ghana’s paper money is a symbolic restatement of something like the “In God We Trust” on America’s currency notes. The faith statement of exclusive trust in God-Nyame is

³⁵⁶ Willis,, 115.

why the *Gye Nyame* Symbol is still very popular among Ghanaians and even Westerners who have lived in Ghana and have come to understand the rhetoric of that Symbol. Part of the reason for the popularity and usage of the Adinkra Symbols around the world is that the Adinkra Symbols are texts, which communicate deep and intelligent messages.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the Adinkra Symbols as symbolic rhetoric from the experiences of the creators of those Symbols. Kwesi Yankah's *Textile Rhetoric*³⁵⁷ and Barber's *Symbol as texts*³⁵⁸ have been the two kinds of literature that have largely informed the discussions in this chapter. We have identified the Adinkra Symbols not only as rhetoric but also as texts. We have realized that the creators of the Adinkra Symbols intended the Symbols to serve Akan religious, economic, and social spaces, by transmitting Akan religious beliefs from one generation of the Akan people to another. Again, the search for the traditional intentions of the Adinkra Symbols has helped us to identify the large religious undergirding of Akan socio-cultural realities.

One key concept that I have unpacked in this chapter is the "Adinkra hermeneutics," which I have developed as an upshot from Larry Caldwell's proposed ethnohermeneutics. I explained that Adinkra hermeneutics is a way of doing Adinkra contextual theology for the Akan people. Therefore, in chapter 4, I will discuss the religious orientations of the Akans by the Adinkra ethnohermeneutic approach.

³⁵⁷ Yankah, *Speaking for the Chief*, 81-83.

³⁵⁸ Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond*, 200.

Chapter 4

Adinkra Symbols: The Revelations of Akan Religiosity



Figure 19

Nyame biribi wɔ soro [ma me nsa nka]: literally, “God there is something in the heavens [let me receive it].”³⁵⁹

In chapter 3, I discussed the Adinkra Symbols as rhetoric instruments for the Akans of Ghana. In that chapter, I also discussed the reality that the Adinkra Symbols are texts, and that because they are texts, they assume different meanings in different social contexts. In this chapter, I will be discussing how succeeding generations of Akans have entextualized the Adinkra Symbols in their historical contexts, and the uses to which they have put the Adinkra Symbols. I will also make the case that the Adinkra Symbols are windows through which one can perceive Akan, and by extension, Ghanaian religiosity. In doing that, I will also point how pervasive religion is in Akan cosmology. The primary goal in this chapter is to show that the Adinkra Symbols facilitate the search for how notoriously religious the Akans of Ghana have been in their past and present historical contexts. I will be discussing the changing phases of the Adinkra Symbols in the different historical contexts of the Akans within the illustration of the social transmission of symbols.

³⁵⁹ Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*. See Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary*, 157.

The Place of Religion among the Akan People

About two decades ago, Mbiti submitted that religion permeates almost all the realities of the life of Africans.³⁶⁰ However, with specific reference to the Akans of Ghana, Rattray had made that observation much earlier. In 1927, Rattray had written an observation about the Asantes, which is so relevant for this chapter that I have quoted a big chunk of it. He observed:

The student who makes careful and sympathetic study of the social institutions of the so-called 'primitive' people, sooner or later finds himself, almost unconsciously, writing what is virtually a book or treatise on primitive religion; for religion, in the sense of the late Sir E. B. Tylor's definition, seems almost inseparable from every action and thought of such people. In Ashanti 'to divorce religion from any of these will be well-nigh impossible and it is hardly an exaggeration to say that any such estrangement would lead to an illegality'. Religion, indeed, in this sense, runs like a silver thread, even through their arts and crafts, and thus tend to become the real inspiration of the craftsman.³⁶¹

The assertion above, which Rattray made, resonates in many African scholarly works. It is a known issue that Africans do not draw a line between what is secular and what is religious. Asamoah-Gyadu draws a similar conclusion as he says, "For the African imagination, sacred and secular realities are inseparable."³⁶² All of life, for the African, is inextricably religious, as Rattray points out in the above quote from his work on Asante art and religion. It seems reasonable for Emeka C. Ekeke, a Nigerian, in his "African Traditional Religion: A Conceptual and Philosophical Analysis" to argue that

³⁶⁰ John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2 Edition (Waveland Press, Inc., 2015), 1.

³⁶¹ Robert. S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, v.

³⁶² J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Witchcraft Accusations and Christianity in Africa Research January 2015 Vol. 39 No. 1 23-27," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 39 (January 2915).

the fact that Africans are notoriously religious is no longer an issue for debate among scholars today.³⁶³

According to Ekeke, the reason for Africans' notoriety as a religious people results from the reality that "various peoples of Africa own a religious system and a set of beliefs and practices which bind them together to their Ultimate."³⁶⁴ In the words of Ndiokwere, "Africans are known to be 'religious' to the marrows."³⁶⁵ In the same work, Ndiokwere significantly suggests that the religiosity of African people is what has constituted the fertile soil for Christianity to grow relatively faster among the peoples of Africa."³⁶⁶ Rattray, Mbiti, Ekeke, and Ndiokwere's observation are reflective of the issues on the ground in Africa. All Africans, as Éla points out, especially those in the south of the Sahara, have a religious subtext to all of their lives. Among the Akans of Ghana, it is not different. In fact, one cannot explain life among the Akans without using tools of religion for disentangling the "webs of significance,"³⁶⁷ which Akans have spun around themselves, like almost all Africans. I want to roll out the issue that Akans are extremely religious with the Nyame biribi wɔ soro (ma me nsa nka) Symbol.

Nyame biribi wɔ soro: The Akan Acted Prayer Form

One of my late great-granduncles, Ohenenana³⁶⁸ Bonsu who was an instructor at the premier technology university in Ghana—the University of Science and Technology

³⁶³ Emeka C. Ekeke, "African Traditional Religion: A Conceptual and Philosophical Analysis," *Lumina*, 22, no. No.2 (n.d.). John S. Mbiti, *African Religions, and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 1.

³⁶⁴ Ekeke., 2.

³⁶⁵ Nathaniel I. Ndiokwere, *The African Church, Today and Tomorrow* (Nigeria: Snaap Press Ltd, 1994)., 17

³⁶⁶ Ndiokwere., 16-17

³⁶⁷ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 5.

³⁶⁸ Ohenenana = Royal grandchild.

in Kumasi—had the *Nyame biribi w soro* Symbol on the main gate to his house. There were times he would touch that Symbol and look up towards heaven before we went out to that university (now known as Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology) where he used to teach woodcarving at the art department. Those days were my earliest encounters with the Adinkra Symbols. According to Danquah, the “*Nyame biribi w soro (ma nsa nka)*”³⁶⁹ symbol used to be stamped on paper and hung above the lintel of a door in the palace of the king of Asante. Danquah further informs that “the king of Asante used to touch this lintel, then his forehead, then his breast, repeating these words, “*Nyame biribi w soro [me nsa nka]*” three times.”³⁷⁰ According to my late granduncle, what he did with that Adinkra Symbol was a prayer to Nyankopon.



Figure 20
Nyame Biribi w soro [na ma me nsa nka] on a wall in Ghana.

Adinkra Symbols for Symbolic Prayers

It seems that some generations ago, in the understanding of some traditional Akans, the Adinkra Symbol, like the *Nyame biribi w soro*, was an instrument for prayer. It also appears that for those Akans of earlier generations, Symbols that were instruments of prayer as the *Nyame biribi w soro [ma me nsa nka]* carried in them the ability to communicate the desired prayer to God when they are invoked by touching. As an emic

³⁶⁹ Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion*, 187.

³⁷⁰ Danquah., 187.

person, I know that generally, Akans do not make a difference between a religious symbol, and the deities to whom that symbol is addressed or represents (or properly, embodies). For instance, Nana Osei Kofi, a son of the late Antoahene, Nana Kwaku Ware, explained to me that the reason why people who are the children of Pra do not eat *afaseε*.³⁷¹ Pra is the god of the Pra River in Ghana. When Akans refer to somebody as a child of Pra, it means one of two things: either that person's parents asked Pra for him or her, or that the person has some form of relationship with the Pra god. According to Nana Osei Kofi, Akans believe that when a woman is barren and consults some of the Akan gods like Pra and Tapa Barnie, these gods are able to send them children and make them pregnant. In most instances, children of the Pra god bear the name Pra. The Pra god abhors the Akan yam, which the Akans call *afaseε*; it is the taboo food of the Pra god. Because of a principle that I want to refer to as the principle of extension, all the children of the Pra god also abhors *afaseε*. *Afaseε* is their taboo food as well. The principle of extension means that the life of the god is extended to his children and all who are related to him. According to Nana Osei Kofi, that is the reason why Asantes have a proverb, which says, “Yere pae *afaseε*, na Pra ada” (literally, “When food sellers are announcing that they have *afaseε* for sale, the child of the Pra god sleeps”). In other words, they do not want anything to do with the *afaseε* because it is their taboo food. The children of the Pra god move away from *afaseε* because the life of the Pra god is extended in their lives. The case of Pra and *afaseε*, which his children cannot eat, is not an isolated case, according Nana Osei, all the gods of the Akan have their taboos, which the people who have relationship with them have to see as their taboos, too. These are illustrations that

³⁷¹ A yam specie in Ghana, found especially among the Akans.

Akans do not make a difference between a god and the people who are related to him or her. In the same understanding, people see the representations of the gods as the gods themselves. It seems that Akan Christians have transferred this understanding of the relationship between a god and issues that represent or embody those gods, to God and issues they consider as representing or embodying God.

The issue of representative and embodying significance, as explained above, is the reason why Akan Christians hold the Bible, which they believe as embodying God's words, as having protective powers for people who hold it or put it under their pillows.³⁷² It is very common to visit a Church member who has given birth to a child and discover that he or she has opened a Psalm or a passage of the Bible that assures of God's protection on the pillow on which the baby is sleeping. As Pobee explains, for Africans, "the Bible is the symbol of the presence of God."³⁷³ "They do this believing that once they open the biblical passage and put it there, that passage of protection activates God's protective power over the child or whoever is sleeping on the pillow.

Again, the representative and embodying understanding of the relationship between the gods and their faithful holds relevance for Akans like my great-granduncle and the kings of Asante in the past who believed that the Adinkra Symbols like *Nyame biribi wɔ soro* [*ma me nsa nka*] can evoke a prayer request and secure answers from God for them. This was the reason why my great-granduncle, Nana Bonsu, believed that his touch of the *Nyame biribi wɔ soro* (*ma me nsa nka*) was an effective prayer. In the broader Akan context, the kings of Asante in the period during the time of Rattray and Nana Bonsu were only living out their religious understanding of the generations of Akan

³⁷² Pobee, "Bible Study in Africa: A Passover of Language.", 161.

³⁷³ Pobee., 161.

among whom they lived. As Willis explains, the *Nyame biribi wɔ soro* Adinkra Symbol reflects the Akan's trust in something that is greater. Willis further explains that the *Nyame biribi wɔ soro* Adinkra Symbol shows the Akan his or her physical limitations and the need to rely on a higher power. Again, Willis, who says that the Symbol is a spiritual concept, says that the *Nyame biribi wɔ soro* Adinkra Symbol is an expression of hope for the Akan that "there is something in the sky, where one can seek guidance."³⁷⁴

For Nana Bonsu, the touching of the *Nyame biribi wɔ soro* Adinkra Symbols was an act of prayer. For him, it was through such symbolic prayers that he affirmed the reality of Nyankopɔn (God/Supreme Being) as traditional Akans do and always petitioned.³⁷⁵ Many traditional Akans who understand that the Adinkra Symbol, by that

³⁷⁴ Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary*.

³⁷⁵ There is a contention which is centered around Danquah's submission that there is a distinction between "Nyame" as a reference to God's glorious divinity; and "Nyankopɔn" as God's creative name (Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion*. Asante agrees with K. A. Dickson that there is difference between "Odomanko Nyame" and "Nyankopɔn" (Emmanuel Asante, *Toward an African Christian Theology of the Kingdom of God: The Kingship of Onyame* (U.S.A: Mellen University Press, 1995). In my fieldwork, Peter Sarpong informed me that Asantes have had a God at Asokore Mampong, now a part of Kumasi, who is called Asokore Mampong "Nyame." The priest of this god is the Asantehene (the king of the Asante kingdom) himself. In fact, Asantes call one of the Kete dances as "Asokore Mampong Nyame" in recognition of that god. I am not aware if Dickson and Asante were aware when they wrote that Asantes have this "Nyame?" It is noted that sometimes, Akan use "Nyame" as a reference to the great God of the Universe whom Asante refers to as the Universal Vital Force (ibid., 87). Danquah builds a case to substantiate this usage. According to him, it is possible that Akans could have built the referent "Nyame" from the name by which God introduced Himself to Moses – "I AM," which is "JHVH" or "Jahveh." Danquah argues that the Akan translation of "I AM" is "EYEME," properly written as "ɛYɛME." Danquah suggests that it is possible that "Nyame" is a translation from "ɛYɛME" (Danquah, 36-37). However, I submit that sometimes Asantes will make the deference between this specific "Asokore Mampong Nyame" or all the other gods on the one hand, and the God of heaven (Nyankopɔn) on the other. This is more so because of the understanding that the descriptive suffix "pɔn" (=the biggest of all) added to "Nyame" indicates that He/She is the biggest of the all the gods. However, this trans-rendering of God as "Nyamepɔn" (= the biggest of all the gods) would have made God one among

acted prayer, reveals that some traditional Akans acknowledge and practice symbolic prayers to Nyankopon. My great-granduncle's understanding of the Symbol as a spiritual reality has support in the work of Willis. In *The Adinkra Dictionary*, he argues that though many users of the Symbol in Ghana today do not understand the meanings of the Adinkra Symbols, the reality remains that the Adinkra symbols have deep spiritual and cultural meanings behind them.³⁷⁶ For referencing to this Adinkra mode of prayer, I referred to it as "Adinkra Symbolic prayer." Such liturgical forms of prayer, according to Idowu, reveal Africans' dependence on God.³⁷⁷ Therefore, the Adinkra symbolic prayer is a source for identifying Akan religiosity. Other symbols are not directly religious, but carried some communication for the Akans in the past. One of such Adinkra Symbols is the *obi nka obi* Symbol.

Obi nka Obi: How it was understood in the Past

In chapter 2, I recounted the myth behind the creation of the *obi nka obi* Adinkra Symbol. I mentioned how Nana Adinkra is said to have dreamt the Symbol and used it to quell a civil insurrection that nearly erupted in the Gyaman kingdom. I mentioned that

equal gods, just bigger. To correct that shortcoming in theology, translators added the descriptive word "koro" (=one and only) to the name "Nyamepon" to make it, as Danquah suggests, "Nyamekoropon" (Danquah, 43). This rendering literally means the one and only "Nyame" without comparison for Akans (i.e. the One Great God who is without comparison). Nyankopon, therefore, means the one and only one who truly satisfies all the longings and needs of human beings. This "Nyamekoropon" has, with time, possible shortening, and alterations of language, become "Nyankopon." Therefore, there is a clear difference between "Nyame" and "Nyankopon" – Nyame, though sometimes used for Nyankopon as the shortened form of "Nyankopon," is generally used for the gods; while "Nyankopon" is an exclusive referent to the Supreme Being or God whom Emmanuel Asante refers to Universal Vital Force (ibid., 87). This is how "Nyankopon" and "Nyame" is in use in this work.

³⁷⁶ Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary*, 42-43.

³⁷⁷ Bolaji E. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (Orbis Books, 1973), 86.

the *Obi nka obi* Symbol came to be understood as an instrument for reminding people that they need to live together peacefully if they want to survive as a people. In those days whoever must have seen the *obi nka obi* Symbol in the original context must have remembered the need-for-peaceful-coexistence metaphor or rhetoric of that Symbol.

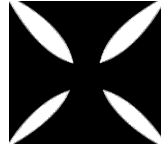


Figure 21
Mmusuyidee/Krapa

The next Adinkra theological Symbol that I will discuss is the *Mmusuyidee*. Literally, the *Mmusuyidee* Symbol, which looks like a cross, means, “that which removes evil, bad omen, bad fortune, taboos, and the punishment for evil.” The Akans have two concepts represented in the *Mmusuyidee* Symbol. They call the same *Mmusuyidee* Symbol the *Krapa* Symbol.³⁷⁸ *Krapa* is from two words joined together, namely, *kra* and *pa*. *Kra* literally can translate as soul or spirit being, or the soul of a person, as Danquah interprets it.³⁷⁹ *Pa* means good. Thus, *Krapa* literally means good spirit or soul. Conceptually, *Krapa* means fortunate, favored, and blessed.

According to Nana Ampadu, whose traditional philosophical song I cited in chapter 1, traditional Akans believe that human beings take their destinies from God before they come into the world through birth. A good spirit for the Akan is the one who comes to the world with fortune, favor, and blessings. However, according to the research officer at the Center for National Culture, *Krapa* and Adinkra Symbols like

³⁷⁸ Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary: A Visual Primer on the Language of Adinkra*, 139.

³⁷⁹ Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion*, xix.

Sunsum (“spirit”) originally connoted the understanding that the human being is also a spiritual being. Willis writes the following about the Akan understanding of the sanctity of human life: *Krapa te se ɔkra; okyiri fi*. He translates it as “sanctity is like a cat; it abhors filth.” The proverb that Willis cites may be better translated as “a good soul or sanctified soul is like a cat; it abhors filth” (filth in this context refers to social, physical, and spiritual contamination). Willis’ explanation that the *Krapa* Adinkra Symbol is, in essence, a cross, and it is a sign for removing evil,³⁸⁰ is very significant and insightful.



Figure 22
Sunsum

This understanding of the theological appreciation of the *Mmusuyidee* Symbol seems to be why Achampong simply interprets the Symbol as a “sacrificial item,” and further explains the Symbol as the “Symbol of religious sacrifice or purification.”³⁸¹ Achampong, on the other hand, further explains, “This symbol represents an offering of any sort to a deity, with the idea of obtaining favor or avoiding disaster or bad luck.”³⁸²

Willis agrees that the *Mmusuyidee* Symbol is a “‘thing’ for sacrifice.”³⁸³ He explains that it is a symbol of spiritual balance, good fortune, good luck, sanctity, spiritual strength, and uprightness of spirit.³⁸⁴ Even though Willis agrees that the

³⁸⁰ Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary: A Visual Primer on the Language of Adinkra*, 139.

³⁸¹ Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, 5.

³⁸² Achampong., 5.

³⁸³ Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary*.

³⁸⁴ Willis., 138

Mmusuyidee Symbol is like the Christian cross, he refuses to say that it is the Christian cross. He meanders from that acknowledgment to say that it is a talisman. However, Akans have a different name for talismans. They call them *suman*, and they are different from the *Mmusuyidee* Symbol. There are different *sumans*, and Akans use them for different functions. Some of them are *awadee suman* (talisman/amulet/charm for protecting or sustaining marriage) and *adwamanbo ano so suman* (talisman for preventing women from having extramarital sexual relationship with other men). Rattray describes a *suman*, which the Asantes call *suman Kwadwo*. According to Rattray:

It consists of a knotted string, to which are attached tufts of tails of the brush-tailed porcupine and a single small leather packet. This **amulet** is worn by a man around his waist and is said to cause any man who attempts to have sexual intercourse with a woman with whom the wearer of the **charm** has had sexual intercourse to become impotent.³⁸⁵

In fact, there is nothing talisman-like about the *Mmusuyidee* Symbol, even though Rattray traces Akan contacts with Muslims to far earlier date.³⁸⁶ It is true that Akans use talismans to ward off bad fortune and evil attacks among the other functions I have mentioned above. However, what Willis does not seem to realize is that there is a difference between *mmusuyie* (literally, “taking away evil consequences, or simply purification ritual”) as warding off evil/bad fortune when no one has broken a taboo and another understanding of *mmusuo*. This latter word describes the ritual for dealing with a taboo committed and its personal and societal evil consequences. The *mmusuo* is what

³⁸⁵ Robert. S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*. Emphasis mine. We may have to note that Rattray uses “amulet” and “charm” for translating “suman.” The reality is that what amulets and charms are, talismans are the same. The three terms: charms, amulets, and talismans can be used interchangeably in Akan contexts. See pp. 20-23 for other talismans that Rattray lists.

³⁸⁶ Robert. S. Rattray., 20. Rattray says that Asantes use to buy some of the amulets/talismans/charms from Mohammedan Hausas, which possibly contained verses of the Koran.

results from the taboo if the society does not deal with the taboo, which has been broken. *Musuyie* is the ritual for dealing with the person who has broken the taboo. *Mmusuyie* is the way by which Akans pacify the offended gods. The import of this *Mmusuyie* (literally, “avert the evil consequences”) is about providing the requirements for appeasing an offended deity, and consequently, warding off the evil that the deity could have caused the offender in particular, and the society in general. Akans believe that an offended deity would visit the offender and the whole society in which he or she lives with calamities (*musuo*) especially if that taboo broken had not been dealt with by appeasing the deity who had been offended.³⁸⁷ The *Mmusuyideε* is the instrument that carries both the metaphor and the ability to affect the required appeasement of the deity. Simply put, the *Mmusuyideε*” stands for a Symbol for warding off the evil consequences of a taboo that a member of the community breaks.

The *Mmusuyideε* Symbol has a two-sided import: On one hand, it is a pacificator toward an offended deity. On the other hand, it is a Symbol of forgiveness and restoration toward the offender and his or her society. In that understanding of *mmusuoyie* (i.e., warding off evil), which Willis obviously misses, there is a slaughter of an animal for asking for forgiveness from the deity for the taboo-breaker. The Akan people call this *mpata*. Therefore, if the Akan people identify that a deity does accept pacification, they call that deity “*pata a angyeε*” (literally, “the one who cannot be pacified, or who does not accept *mpata*, or ‘pacifications’”), and therefore, does not cause *mmusuyie* (the warding off of the evil consequences for the taboo broken). Akans also have the ritual cleansing (*adwera*, “ritual cleaning” or *adwareε*, “ritual bathing”) of the taboo-breaker

³⁸⁷ Interview with the Nsumankwaahene (the traditional high priest of the Asante kingdom).

and all the people who take part in the *mmusuoyie*. Then, finally, there is the restoration of the person who broke the taboo back to the community.

In an interview with the *Sumankwaahene* (the traditional high priest of the Asante Kingdom), the late Nana Gyeabour, he described Akan purification rituals (*mmusuyie* or *mmusuoyie*).³⁸⁸ According to Nana Gyeabour, Akan purification rituals involve the slaughter and the use of the blood of sheep (but sometimes fowl), hyssop, and *hyire* powdered white clay. The ritual is a public issue. The evil omen of the religious offender (like someone who has had sexual intercourse with a woman in the bush or on the farm, or someone who has taken another person's wife) is transferred by prayer/incantations onto the sheep or fowl. The sheep is then slaughtered by the traditional priest(ess) to the deity, and the blood is received into a receptacle. Some of the blood is then sprinkled onto the offender, after which *nyankonsuo* (pure rain water collected into a receptacle on the *nyamedua*, "God's tree") is also sprinkled on the offender for his or her purification.

After the *nyankonsuo* sprinkling, some of the *nyankonsuo* is mixed with the white clay and it is then smeared on the body of the offender. The body smearing with the *nyankonsuo* and white clay is done as an act for declaring the person sanctified and purified from the taboo he or she broke, and as a way of declaring the offender fit to be reintegrated into the community and the community's religious, social, and economic life once again. It is a declaration that the person can be reintegrated into the community without the incurrance of evil as punishment from the gods and the Ancestors.

In traditional settings in Ghana today, religious practitioners still perform the

³⁸⁸ Barffour Gyeabour, Purification Rites in Asante, Face to face interaction, June 11, 2006., used in, Kofi Amoateng, *The Relevance of Akan Traditional Forms of Asubo for Christian Baptismal Liturgy in Akan Methodist Churches* (Trinity Theological Seminary, Accra: MTh Thesis, Unpublished, 2008).

purificatory ritual, which Nana Gyeabour described to me. In fact, I conducted the interview not long ago (2006), and Nana Gyeabour implied that was how he, as the traditional high priest of Asante, was performing such purifications whenever it came up. However, as I indicated in chapter 1, the majority of Ghanaians today claim they are Christians (over 70 percent). Nevertheless, the practice Nana Gyeabour describes is still common in Ghana. Traditional priests still performed such rituals as part of the Akan traditional religion. For instance, according to Nana Osei Kofi, the people who come to the Antoa Shrine for offsetting curses imposed on them still go through rituals, which include the slaughter of animals (fowls). He says the *Antoa Nyamaa* rituals are similar to what Nana Gyeabour described to me. Ghanaian Christianity seems not to have eradicated such traditional religious practices from the social and political landscape.

In the weeks leading up to the 2016 election, there were several instances of people, including traditional priests, who openly slaughtered animals and crushed eggs as part of invoking curses of the traditional gods on anybody who was going to cheat or was going to help any party cheat. They believed that many Ghanaians, including people who claim to be Christians, fear the curses of the traditional gods. According to Nana Osei Kofi, family members continue to bring relations, including even those who call themselves Christians to the *Antoa Nyamaa* Shrine for such rituals.³⁸⁹ They bring them to the shrine either because they have wrongly invoked the curse of the shrine on another person, or because they offended someone, and the offended people invoked the curse of the *Antoa Nyamaa* Shrine on them. The frequency of such invocation of curses of the gods is a situation about which Sarpong laments, and says has made Ghanaian Christians become

³⁸⁹ Osei Kofi, The Religious Adinkra Symbols and Possible Christian Doctrines, March 12, 2017.

like frogs who jump in and out of water as it suits them.³⁹⁰ What Sarpong means by the frog analogy is similar to what Hiebert, Tiénou, and Shaw refer to as “split-level Christianity.”³⁹¹ This is why Willis, after referring to the *mmusuyidee* as talisman, turns around to write:

Musuyidee is a symbol of spiritual balance or spiritual cleansing. When a person has committed a taboo, a sacrifice is performed as penance. It is also a symbol of sacrifice.³⁹²

Nana Gyeabour said that Akans believe that evil fortune invoked through the religious offense of one person in a community can contagiously affect all the people of the community. The consequential anger of the gods can result in the withholding of rain, and therefore, bring famine, which will affect everybody in the community. The anger of the gods can also result in a plague from which many citizens of the tribe or community can die. Therefore, the ritual purifications for committed taboos have to involve people of the community, especially the immediate members of the taboo breaker’s extended family. According to Nana Gyeabour, as I said earlier the ritual is a public issue. For that same reason, some of the *nyankonsuo* is sprinkled on the people who witness the purification. Again, for the same reasons, the officiating traditional priest smears some of the white clay on the bodies of those who witness the purification. The offender and all those on whose bodies the traditional priest smears the white clay have to leave the clay on their bodies overnight. They cannot bathe the clay off that same day.

³⁹⁰ Sarpong, *Peoples Differ*, 18.

³⁹¹ Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 15-18.

³⁹² Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary*, 139.

The use of talismans is more for warding off evil omen and attacks, which Akans believe they have to contend with in their cosmology, not because they have broken any taboo, but because of jealousy and envy. Akans do not use talisman for purification rituals. Danquah, therefore, translates the *Mmusuyidee* Symbol, which is the symbol of “pacification,” “cleansing and reintegration” as “Evil Diverting Talisman.”³⁹³ However, I wish Danquah had not used “talisman” but “symbol,” which he later used in that translation. I am suggesting that Danquah should have used “symbol,” because a symbol as I indicated in chapter 3 has the ability to cause what they speak to. If Danquah had used symbol, it would have made the difference between talisman and *Mmusuyidee* as a religious Symbol. It seems his use of “Talisman for the *Mmusuyidee* Symbol is part of the reasons that misled great scholars like Willis to translate the *Mmusuyidee* Symbol as talisman. Danquah further notes, “A cloth with this design stamped on it lay beside the sleeping couch of the King of Ashanti, and every morning when he rose he placed his left foot upon it three times.”³⁹⁴ Danquah does not offer the reason for this ritual of the king of Asante; however, it is obvious that it was another form of symbolic prayer.

Osei Kofi says that the king of Asante does that ritual for asking for every form of unknown sin for himself and all Asantes, as their representative. However, it important for us not to miss the issue that the *Mmusuyidee* Symbol has the shape of the Christian cross (St. Florian or the Maltese crosses). We should not miss the reality that the cross is symbolic of salvation, pardon, forgiveness, freedom from condemnation for sin, deliverance from evil, and all forms of powers of negations in Christianity. Osei Kofi

³⁹³ Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion*, 79. It seems that Danquah uses “design” and “symbol” interchangeably.

³⁹⁴ Danquah., 79.

pointed to two important issues. First, he pointed to the similarity between the cross of the *Mmusuyidee* Symbol and the cross of Christianity. Second, he said that in Adinkra ethnohermeneutics, he sees the *Mmusuyidee* Symbol as having relevant application for the Christian doctrine of salvation, atonement, restoration, and sanctification.³⁹⁵ The *Mmusuyidee* Symbol will therefore speak to the Akan in deeper ways than the philosophical articulations about salvation, which in comparison, has no similar depth of meaning within the Akan symbols epistemologically-oriented cosmology. The critical investigation, therefore, is about why the Akans have a symbol that does not only look like the Christian cross but also carries the same significance as the Christian cross. This realization forces an objective researcher to investigate whether or not Akans had a previous encounter with Christianity before the sixteenth-century Western missionaries came to Ghana.

We can see from the *Nyame biribi wo soro [ma me nsa nka]* that in the past, Akans attributed serious representative functions to symbols themselves. We can also identify the characteristic Akan religious propensity in how the Adinkra Symbols were used in the past. In the next paragraph, I will discuss the socially and religiously constructed interpretations Akans/Ghanaian are applying to the Adinkra Symbol, and how and where they are using the symbols in contemporary times.

Contemporary Social and Religious Applications of the Adinkra Symbols

The Adinkra Symbols are still very popular in Ghana even in contemporary times. The symbols are applied to different settings and contexts to make social, religious, and

³⁹⁵ Kofi, The Religious Adinkra Symbols and Possible Christian Doctrines.

even economic statements. I will discuss some of the uses of the Adinkra Symbols in public spaces, the church's uses of them, as well as how they are used in political spaces in Ghana today. However, let me propose a theory to explain the issue that the Akan people's use of the Adinkra Symbols is in line with how culture-specific people transmit their socially-constructed realities through the various ages of their existence as a people. In chapter 3, I promised to illustrate how societies transmit their cultural realities to the ensuing generations. Let me discuss that here. This theory will help us to understand why the meanings of the Adinkra Symbols and their sociopolitical and religious significance for the Akan people, for instance, have survived until contemporary times. I want to refer to this as the social transmission of symbols.

Social Transmission of Symbolic Texts

It is important that I describe how I perceive the nature of the transmission of symbols within sociocultural contexts. The description will help the discussion of the different phases the Adinkra Symbols have been assuming in the history of the Akan people.

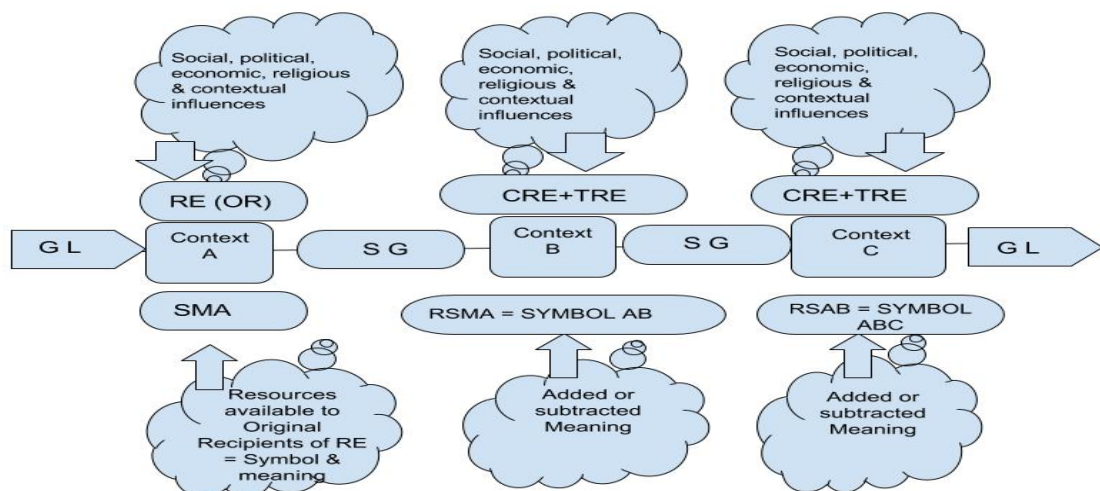


Figure 23

- | | | |
|--------|---|----------------------------------|
| 1. GL | = | Generation Line |
| 2. RE | = | Religious Experience |
| 3. OR | = | Original Recipient(s) |
| 4. SMA | = | Symbolic Memory Anchor |
| 5. TRE | = | Transferred Religious Experience |
| 6. RC | = | Receiving Community |
| 7. CRE | = | Contextual Religious Experience |
| 8. SG | = | Succeeding Generation Gap |

Explanation of the Figure

GL is the generation line, which describes the evolving history of a people. On this historic line, I sampled three contexts: Context A, Context B, and Context C. These contexts represent recognizable periods in the cultural history of a people. These periods of the cultural history of a people stand out because they are periods in which the people of that culture respond consciously and unconsciously to social, political, economic, and other contextual influences, which induce the search for answers in them. Normally primal members of the people's history experiences significant issues for their survival, and they do not want to lose the experience and what the experience signifies for them and their generations after them. When that becomes the case, they create symbols from resources available to them in symbols as symbolic memory anchors (SMAs) for carrying the metaphors or rhetoric, which the symbols crystallize for those purposes for transmission onto unborn generations.

The members of the cultural group who had the religious experiences (REs) will purposefully share the symbols and the metaphors or rhetoric they create until the symbolic becomes what Zahniser calls "dominant symbols."³⁹⁶ For some generations after the origins of these symbols, the symbols will hold their significant metaphors or

³⁹⁶ Zahniser, *Symbol and Ceremony: Making Disciples Across Cultures.*, 78

rhetoric for the people of that culture in the space of time, which I refer to as the succeeding generation gap (SG). In these SG epochs, the original metaphor of the symbols will serve the purposes of their original creators until a succeeding generation of the people encounters challenging realities of a different social, political, economic, and other contextual influences, which will, in turn, induce them to search for contextual answers. My submission is that people do not entirely discard their inherited traditions for an entirely new solution for such realities that challenge their survival. What happens is that they rather process the contemporary contextual religious experiences (CREs) together with their inherited traditions or transferred religious experiences (TREs) into new religious symbolic memory anchors (RSMAs), and thus create new symbols from the old one. Symbol A, in that understanding, is appropriated into Symbol AB.

The same process of symbolic alterations will continue to evolve until the people of that culture in another context process their TREs together with their CREs to achieve a new symbolic form, which will be Symbol ABC. The process will create a newer form of RSMAs to serve the purposes of that generation. One notable issue in all of these progressions and transmissions of the symbolic through different epochs of the people of a culture is that people of cultures, normally, do not entirely throw away the original inherited SMAs, which their Ancestors leave for them. Rather, they add to it to make it more appropriate and significant, or they will lose the metaphor of the original SMA. As Gyekye affirms, “The truth of the assertion that every society in the modern world inherits ancestral cultural values implies that modernity is not always a rejection of the past.”³⁹⁷

³⁹⁷ Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, 217.

In this chapter, I have discussed this rootedness of the modern in the traditions of the past as it relates to the Adinkra symbols and how their meanings have expanded because of evolving contexts to cover social, corporate, and political spaces, as well as religious ones in Ghana in contemporary times.

The caution, however, is that if the later generations of the people of the symbol take their socially-constructed meanings of the symbols too far away from their original and intended meanings, the symbols lose their original significance and intended purpose. It is, therefore, my submission that the proper way of interpreting a symbol in the search for meaning, as I indicated in chapters 1 and 3, is by what I refer to as “Adinkra ethnohermeneutics.” Adinkra ethnohermeneutics, as I explained, employs the stories or myths behind the Adinkra Symbols for identifying the original meanings of the symbols. It also adopts appropriate ways toward applying the original meanings of the symbols to new contexts. The Adinkra hermeneutical approach has the potential of preserving some of the original meanings of a symbol—if not all of it—while at the same time, allowing for that symbol the elasticity that is required for applying the meanings and significance of that symbol to new contexts. This explains why Akans will continue to use the Adinkra symbols in dealing with modern or contemporary realities.

The Use of Adinkra Symbols in Public Spaces

Willis says that many people in Ghana use the symbols without really understanding what they mean.³⁹⁸ To some significant extent, those conclusions may be a reality. However, it is also a certainty that some Akans or Ghanaians use the Adinkra

³⁹⁸ Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary*, 43.

Symbols for identity or representative reasons in contemporary times. The usage of the Adinkra Symbols for identity purposes is because it is known globally in contemporary times that the Adinkra Symbols are Ghanaian symbols. Therefore, to use the symbols bears testimony to a person's link to Ghana. In other words, the Adinkra Symbols in addition to the use of *kente* cloth have become representations of Ghanaian national identity. In that understanding, one may encounter many people in Ghana who use the Adinkra Symbols without understanding their primary or traditional meanings. Nevertheless, even the use of the symbols without knowledge of their traditional meanings does not mean people use the symbols only for their aesthetic significance as Agbo suggests,³⁹⁹ or as Willis concludes.⁴⁰⁰ The use of the Adinkra Symbols for national identification in and of itself is also rhetoric; it has become a symbolic communication of one's ties to Ghana and therefore has assumed a new meaning for Ghanaian people. The love for national identification accounts for part of the rise in the popularity of Adinkra Symbols on metal gates in Ghana. For instance, the refurbished Manhyia Palace, the official residence of the king of the Asante Kingdom, gave prominence to such Adinkra Symbols on the gates and the metal fencings of the palace.



Figure 24

Manhyia Palace fence displaying Adinkra Symbols all over it.

³⁹⁹ Agbo, *Values of Adinkra Symbols*, v.

⁴⁰⁰ Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary*, 43.

It is also very common for an observer to see Adinkra Symbols displayed in front of corporate offices. The number of the symbols on display at the main entrance of TV Africa offices in Accra include the *Sankofa*,⁴⁰¹ the *Fofo/Mfofoo*,⁴⁰² *Fihankra*,⁴⁰³ *Obi nka 'bi*, *Akofena*,⁴⁰⁴ and *Musuyideε*.”⁴⁰⁵ TV Africa is a modern media house that a known and accomplished traditionalist Kwaw Ansah of the film, *Heritage Africa* fame,⁴⁰⁶ owns. The display of the symbols on the front metal fencings is not strange. However, according to

⁴⁰¹ Willis says it literally means "Go back to fetch it.," and that is symbolic of learning from the past to building the future. See, Willis, 188. However, it is not only for building the future. It more for building the present or the here and now. That seems to be why Achampong sums it up as meaning "Go and bring it back [to the present]." For Achampong, the Symbol communicates pride in one's past and culture," see Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, 11.

⁴⁰² Achampong says it is the "Bidens pilosa plant," and he explains that it is the "symbol of selfishness and malicious intent." Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, 56. Willis on the other hand, explains that the Symbol speaks as a warning against "jealousy and covetousness" in Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary*, 108-109.

⁴⁰³ Both Achampong and Willis say it literally communicates enclosed/complete circuit or secured house/dwelling," and that it speaks to concepts like brotherhood, safety, security, completeness and solidarity." Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary*, 106-107. see also, Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, 29. However, my informants at Ntonso told me that it symbolizes more of "the security of the home/family."

⁴⁰⁴ Literally, "war sword," and it symbolizes authority or legitimized authority." See, Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*. This seems to be why Chiefs and the President of the Republic of Ghana swear with a sword in their right hand, pointing out. This seems to be the reason why Willis refers to it as "The State Ceremonial Swords," Willis, *ibid.*, 68.

⁴⁰⁵ Achampong says it literally means "Sacrificial item," and that it is a symbol of "religious sacrifice or purification." See, Achampong., 5. Willis' interpretation, which transliterates it as "'Thing' for sacrifice" might be meaning the same thing, except that his comparison of this Symbol to a talisman seems to force a religious item, which traditional priests use as protective items unto the "Musuyideε" Symbol. In its traditional understanding, the "Musuyideε" Symbol is never associated with talismans. The issue that it looked like a St. Nicholas Cross required some investigation. Why did traditional Akans use the Cross in their pre-missionary epoch religious culture and gave it a similar rhetoric and significance like that of Christianity? Is it really the case that the pre-missionary period Akans did not have any knowledge of Christianity? like I will explain this in Chapter 5.

⁴⁰⁶ Kwaw Ansah, *Heritage Africa* (Film Africa in conjunction with MK Winding, London, 1988).

Okyeame Quophi, a television presenter at TV Africa, the Adinkra Symbols there communicate sentiments, values, and assurances of that corporate entity via their use.

Again, on the main glass doors and the glass walls of the offices of the telephone giant in Ghana, Vodafone in Accra, that is at Cantonment, and Adum in Kumasi, one sees multiple Adinkra Symbols on display. One can also notice more of the *Nyame biribi wɔ soro* Symbol on these Vodafone walls and main doors.⁴⁰⁷ These institutions are not the only ones that have displayed the Adinkra Symbols in their corporate spaces. The studios of Adom TV also have Adinkra Symbols, including the *Nyame biribi wɔ soro* Symbol exhibited and used in communication there. The numbers of the homes and the institutions that have Adinkra Symbolic rhetoric on them are huge. As I explained in chapter 3, when Akans put such symbols on display, the majority of them are expressing religious faith, hope, sentiments, and philosophies of life through these symbols.⁴⁰⁸ I have observed that those understandings of the Adinkra Symbols have not entirely changed. As Okyeame Quophi, a TV Presenter at TV Africa explained, “by such Adinkra symbolic representations, Akans still express deep experiences and understanding of God, nature, life, community, and so on.”⁴⁰⁹ This is just as Nkansah-Obrempong points out:

The Akan notion or concept of God is based on their experiences of God. The Akan’s understanding of Onyame [i.e. Nyankopon] and the way they feel and think about Him depends upon their experiences in life and the way they understand their universe.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁷ See Appendix 5.

⁴⁰⁸ Peter K. Sarpong, “Foreword,” in Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, iv-vi. See Nana Kusi Boachie Yiadom’s (Omanhene of Suma Traditional Area) interview with Adu-Gyamerah, “Daily Graphic, March 16, 2016.”

⁴⁰⁹ Okyeame Quophi, What is the Significance of the Adinkra Symbols on the Walls of TV Africa?, 2016.

⁴¹⁰ Nkansah-Obrempong, *Visual Theology*, 182-183.

In Ghana today, the Adinkra Symbols are finding spaces and new expressions not only in the social and economic worlds but also in the religious domain. The reality of these transmutation of meanings and applications for the Adinkra Symbols does not have to be surprising to the contemporary reader, because as I alluded to earlier in this chapter with the diagram for illustrating the social transmission of symbolic texts. We have to note that in theoretical framework, I mentioned that symbols are created to communicate about experiences of the past that outlast the here-and-now. These emergent and improvisatory attributes of texts do not seem to end with their creation, because as Barber admits, texts are meant to make concepts stick through generations of social and historical contexts.⁴¹¹ It is my intention to also discuss how Ghana is reinventing and applying the meanings of the Adinkra Symbols in her world in contemporary times. I have realized that the reinvention of meanings for the Adinkra Symbols/texts have obviously been routed through a dynamic tension. The dynamic tension is about the struggle to preserve the original meanings that the symbols carried, and the need for an improvisatory rendering of the same symbols toward making them relevant and applicable to Ghana's emerging social, religious, and historical context.

In chapter 3, I submitted that the Adinkra Symbols are special traditional speechifiers for primarily the Akan people of Ghana. However, in contemporary times, the symbols are becoming rhetoric artifacts for all Ghanaians. In the year 2016 pre-election, tension and the fear of possible postelection civil war soared extremely high. In the face of that tension and the reasonable fear, one of the main issues that was used to

⁴¹¹ Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond.*, 67.

bring down the tensions, in addition to the *Obi nka 'bi* Symbol, is a mascot of a personified Ghana map.



Figure 25
The peace mascot⁴¹²

This mascot has the *Gye Nyame* Adinkra Symbol as her earrings, and the leaders (John Mahama of the National Democratic Congress and Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo of the New Patriotic Party) of the two-main rival political parties are pulling the demon of civil war who is wielding a machete away from attacking that country.

In the months leading to the 2016 elections in Ghana, the various social media pages were saturated with cartoons like the one below, which the creator obviously means to use for educating the Ghanaian public and voters on the need for peace and tolerance in the electoral process, the creator employs six Adinkra Symbols on a canoe. In this canoe are some of the presidential aspirants and Ghana's electoral commissioner.

For the instrumental relevance of this cartoon, which is heavily impregnated with symbolisms, let us refer to it as the canoe cartoon of peace.

⁴¹² Fokuo, Fleank "Ghana Needs Peace." Concept Art (2016).

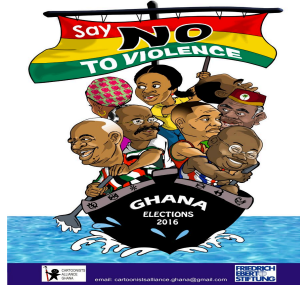




Figure 26
The canoe cartoon of peace⁴¹³





We identify that the cartoonist employed the use of the following Adinkra Symbols in this canoe of peace cartoon.

1.  **Gye Nyame**: As explained earlier, it is a reminder that Ghanaians have to depend on God, as the omniscient, omnipotent, creator, and redeemer⁴¹⁴ for the choice of the leader for the period. The implication is that human choice will surely fail them, and so they have to commit the elections to prayer. We have to note that it is significant that the *Gye Nyame* Symbol was the first one that was placed on the canoe (Ghanaians read from left to right). This is to show that for Ghanaians, God comes first, even in our politics.
2.  **Boa me na me mmoa wo**: Literally, “help me and let me help you”. It is a symbol of cooperation and interdependence.⁴¹⁵ In the context in which it is used, it is a reminder that political leadership requires cooperation to be effective, and to discourage divisive and selfish antagonistic rivalry.

⁴¹³ Cartoons Alliance of Ghana, “Ghana Elections 2016.”
Cartoonistalliance.ghana@gmail.com (2016).

⁴¹⁴ Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, 1.

⁴¹⁵ Research Officer, Contemporary Meanings of the Adinkra Symbols, and the Place of the Adinkra Symbols in Akan Traditional Religion, February 15, 2015.

3.  **Ananse ntontan**: a symbol of wisdom creativity.⁴¹⁶ The *Ananse Ntontan* is a call on Ghanaians to use their acknowledged traditional wisdom and creativity to handle the current political turbulence and sail through it to safety.
4.  **Wawa aba**: a symbol of hardiness, toughness, and perseverance.”⁴¹⁷ In this context, it is a call on Ghanaians to be tough, and not to allow political differences to so divide them that they get at each other’s throats for mutual destruction.
5.  **Akoko nan**: a symbol of “protectiveness and parental discipline,”⁴¹⁸ which is meant to inform every parent to talk to his or her children so that they do not become used for starting a postelection civil war.
6.  **Sankofa**: Either of the two symbols here is a representation of the *Sankofa* Symbol of pride in one’s cultural past,⁴¹⁹ and traditional ways of doing things. Symbols like these can be reminders to Ghanaians that we have always been electing leaders peacefully, even in the days of our Ancestors without any wars. It is also a call to the issue that if Westernized democracy is disturbing our peace, we should return to the old traditional democratic ways of electing our leaders since that has been tested over time and found to work in our context.

The use of these Adinkra Symbols in that political space in Ghana illustrates not only how Ghanaians improvisatorially are bringing new meanings to the Adinkra

⁴¹⁶ Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary*, 76-77.

⁴¹⁷ Willis., 196-197.

⁴¹⁸ Willis., 70-71.

⁴¹⁹ Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, 11.

Symbols, but it also indicates how traditional Adinkra Symbols have been given relevance in Ghana's emerging public space.

Some Notes

The peace mascot was put in the public domain without a trace of who created it. However, in a discussion of the mascot with some Ghanaians in the Ghanaian Methodist Church where I pastor in Lexington, Kentucky, we drew the following notes about the rhetoric of that peace mascot.

First, we concluded that the tears in the eyes of the Ghana map seems to be a rhetoric of a nation that is crying; and in the context of the anxious moments in Ghana, leading to the general election, we concluded that the peace mascot is crying for salvation. such ethnohermeneutic of the Adinkra symbolic text is especially reasonable since "save me" is written on that map of Ghana. Second, we concluded that the "save me" and the *Gye Nyame* Adinkra Symbol in the mascot's ears, and the leaders of the parties who are pulling the machete-wielding demon of war away from that mascot, is a symbolic national prayer. I mentioned earlier in this chapter that originally chiefs and elders of the Akans believed in praying via Adinkra Symbols. My Ghanaians-in-America focus group at the Trinity Hill United Methodist Church, Lexington, Kentucky, United States of America, also interpreted the mascot as a call on the presidential aspirants to work toward preserving Ghana's peace and doing whatever it is in their power to do in order to save Ghana from a civil war because of an election. If our interpretation was the mind of the creator of the peace mascot, then the mascot is probably a call on Ghanaians to act with civility and patriotism for the salvation of the nation.

Therefore, when I wrote that the Adinkra Symbols rhetoric (chapter 3), I implied that although the usage of the symbols as decorative/aesthetic pieces is significantly identified in Ghana, the Adinkra Symbols are not just aesthetic pieces. They are, as the *Sumamanhene* articulates, predominantly vehicles to the affirmations of deep philosophical and spiritual realities,⁴²⁰ which the Akans have created to represent and communicate their deep experiences, including their experiences of God.

The Use of the Adinkra Symbols in Ghana's Religious Space

An emerging significant issue regarding the use to which the contemporary Ghanaian Church is putting the Adinkra Symbols is both revolutionary and interesting. In the focus group interaction at Atwima Koforidua in Kumasi, two members of the group, Akwasi Yeboah and Grace Agyemang, made significant confessions. They all expressed their surprise about the issue that the Adinkra Symbols can communicate the godly faith of the Akan Ancestors. According to them, they had considered all along the Adinkra Symbols as artifacts that belong to the domain of the *abosom* (traditional gods) of the Akans. They also declared that now that they have come to know that the symbols in and of themselves are not satanic, and that they are more of realities for the worship of God, they were going to start learning about them. The issue that people like Akwasi Yeboah and Grace Agyemang will not see the Adinkra Symbols as Christian, but as something for the Akan gods, is reasonable. The understanding of the symbols as religious symbols was very known among Akans at least as far back as the 1920s. For instance, is because

⁴²⁰ Adu-Gyamrah, "Daily Graphic, March 16, 2016."

the symbols have been decorative pieces on walls in the shrines of the traditional gods for a long time.



Figure 27

A traditional Akan shrine, taken from the public domain, accessed on November 1, 2017. The Shrine has the *Dweninimen* (ram horns—symbol of strength) symbol decorating the lower parts of the walls, with the traditional priestess with her traditional raffia skirt standing at the entrance. The photo was taken in the 1920s.

The story of Akwasi Yeboah and Grace Agyemang are not isolated cases. A story like that one is indicative of the dichotomy that inherited-Christianity has created between African cultural issues and symbolisms, and what missionary Christianity largely handed down to Ghanaians as true Christianity. The pervading understanding has been that to be a true Christian is to separate oneself from anything Ghanaian culture.

However, in contemporary times, that understanding of Christianity is changing. During my research in Ghana, I visited two Roman Catholic cathedrals, St. Peter's Basilica in Kumasi, and the Holy Spirit Cathedral in Accra. I also visited two Methodist cathedrals in Ashaiman and Winneba. As I mentioned in chapter 1, in the Holy Spirit Cathedral in Accra, I counted about five Adinkra Symbols displayed behind the altar, in addition to one cross. Years ago, the only symbol seen would have been the cross. We

noted that significantly, of the five Adinkra Symbols that I saw in the cathedral, one was a big *Gye Nyame* Adinkra Symbol, which was so conspicuously displayed on the wall that it competed in recognition with the cross. In the General Introduction, I also recounted how the young people of St. Peter's Basilica accepted the Adinkra Symbols as the decorative pieces and rhetoric in the glaze windows of that Basilica instead of the traditional Christian symbols.

In the Methodist cathedral at Winneba I also saw many Adinkra Symbols in that cathedral making religious rhetoric. The Ashaiman St. Peter's Methodist Church had many more of the Adinkra Symbols than I knew. What is more, these days, the Ghanaian clergy have started using ministerial stoles with the Adinkra Symbols embossed in them.

The pervasive use of the Adinkra Symbols indicates an important shift in Ghanaian Christianity. The issue communicates loudly about how the Church in Ghana is entextualizing new meanings to the Adinkra Symbols and using them for godly rhetoric in contemporary Ghanaian religious or theological spaces. Of important recognition is the issue that even if the Adinkra Symbols are disputed as issues for the Christian faith of the Akan Ancestors in the past centuries, the contemporary Ghanaian Church has claimed the symbols and given them Christian interpretation for use in architecture, ministerial robing, and liturgy.

I am, therefore, compelled to see the use of the Adinkra Symbols in Ghana's Church spaces as a strong endorsement of Danquah's groundbreaking work in which he proposed that the Adinkra Symbols are Akan theological texts. They advocate the issue

that the Adinkra Symbols reveal the knowledge of God among the Akan people.⁴²¹ Therefore, the question that I am devoting the remainder of this chapter to discussing is how the Adinkra Symbols constitute an open window for an observer to discern the Akan people's understanding of God, as well as who He is in their lives within their social, religious, and historical contexts.

Adinkra Symbols in Akan/Ghanaian Religious Spaces: What Implications?

Since I have been discussing the Adinkra symbolic prayer, I submit it will fit very well to begin a discussion on the Adinkra Symbols in the past, as well as in contemporary Ghana. As I do that, I will also discuss the mutations of how the Adinkra Symbols have continued to reveal Akan religiosity. Let us first look at the Adinkra symbolic prayer.

The Adinkra Symbolic Prayer Revisited

The Adinkra symbolic prayer shows that we can assume that Nana Bonsu, the kings of Asante, and traditional Akans who share in that symbolic worldview declare their daily hope in God as the one on whom they rely for protection and sustenance in such symbolic prayers. The conceptual foundation for the hope, which is expressed in this symbolic prayer, is the Akan belief that Nyankopɔn (God) is the only all-powerful one, and that He is the giver of power to all those who have power.⁴²² Again, the *Nyame biribi wɔ soro* Symbol carries the idea that Nyankopɔn is the real protector and sustainer

⁴²¹ See Peter Sarpong's "Preface" in Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, iv. Nkansa-Obrempong, 200-201, . See Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion*. the report of the Sumamanhene on the Adinkra Symbols, in Adu-Gyamrah, "Daily Graphic, March 16, 2016." As I have indicated in the previous chapters, some of my informants like the Research Officer at the Center for National Culture at Kumasi and the focus group interviewees all contended that the Adinkra Symbols reveal the Akan knowledge of God.

⁴²² Nkansa-Obrempong, *Visual Theology*, 224.

of all life. When the *Asantehene* prayed the *Nyame biribi wɔ soro* Adinkra Symbolic prayer, he was trusting God for daily providence. As Nkansah-Obrempong points out, “The Akan metaphor for God as Father-Mother God (*Agya Obaatan Pa*) summarizes the Akan idea of the providence of God.”⁴²³ Furthermore, Nkansah-Obrempong explains that “like a parent, God cares, comforts, protects, feeds, provides for all their needs and ensures their safety and comfort.”⁴²⁴ Therefore, the kings of Asante and Nana Bonsu’s acted prayer constituted a different mode of prayer, which is different in form from the form of prayer, which converts to missionary Christianity were taught. Nevertheless, for the traditional Akan people the symbolic prayers indicate the deep religious orientation of my great- grand uncle and his contemporary Akans. In the later part of this chapter, when I discuss the contemporary uses of the Adinkra Symbols in Ghana, I will point out how the reality that religious orientation is still pervasive among Akans, and for that matter Ghanaians. I will also discuss how this pervasive religious orientation, though it has acquired new entextualizations, has not assumed entirely new attitudes in Ghanaian social and religious life. It is, however, important that I mention it here that the *Nyame biribi wɔ soro* [*ma me nsa nka*] prayer gives the indication of the depth of the belief in God, which the Akan people have. Even in contemporary Ghana, the talking drums of the *Asantehene* continue to have the *Nyame biribi wɔ soro* Symbol not only displayed on it, but also as the protective wings of the emblem of the Asante Kingdom.

⁴²³ Nkansah-Obrempong., 222

⁴²⁴ Nkansah-Obrempong., 222.



Figure 28

The *atumpan* (talking drums) of *Asantehene* (the king of Asante Kingdom) with the *Nyame biribi w soro, ma me nsa nka* Adinkra Symbol on them.

Toward identifying the religiosity of the Akan people via the Adinkra symbolizations, I am selecting three (because of the limitedness of this work) of the religious Adinkra Symbols for discussions. The first one I am discussing because of its preeminence in Akan cosmology is the *Nyame ne hene* Symbol. The *Nyame ne hene* symbol is the *Gye Nyame* Symbol with a circular star around it.



Figure 29

Nyame ne Hene

The circle symbol is the symbol for rulership or kingship. For that reason, the *Adinkrahene* is represented in three circles.

However, when *Nyankopɔn* is represented as a starry circle, it refers more to the kingship of God and His children, *nananom abosom* (the Akan referent for the traditional gods). *Nananom abosom* are believed to be *Nyankopɔn*'s (God's) deputies or assistances

for governing the world.⁴²⁵ The Adinkra Symbol *Nsoroma* (see Figure 30 below) were believed to be children of God.

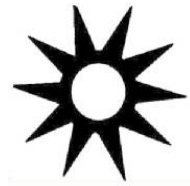


Figure 30
Nsoroma

In 2005, while I was in a field research at Dixcove in Ghana, an informant who was a traditional priestess, *ɔkomfoɔ*⁴²⁶ Gyakyewaa, told me that the stars are the gods.⁴²⁷ The belief that the stars are gods seems to be why Achampong explains, “Among idolaters the stars become objects of worship.”⁴²⁸ I found this is interesting because the Akan expression for “star” is *nsoroma*. According to Willis, this symbol literally means “a child of heaven.” However, there seems to be some misrepresentation in Willis’ translation. In Akan language, *nsoroma* will be the plural, and that will translate “children of heaven.” Akans do not use the singular, which will translate as *Esoroba* in their language in reference to a star. They use the plural form *nsoroma* because of this “children of God” interpretation, which people give to the stars. In that understanding, *Nsoroma* seems to be an adulteration of *Ɔsoro mma* (“children of the

⁴²⁵ Nkansah-Obrempong, 240.

⁴²⁶ Pronounced as Orkormfour, it is the Akan referent for the traditional priests of Nananom Abosom.

⁴²⁷ *ɔkomfoɔ* Gyakyewaa, Relevance of Akan Asubɔ For Christian Baptismal Liturgy, Fieldwork, Person to Person, September 12, 2005.

⁴²⁸ Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, 20.

sky/heaven/God”).⁴²⁹ I found this is significant because Akans refer to the sky either as a representative of God or as God Himself.⁴³⁰

There are Akan sayings that assume that God is in the firmament, or the understanding of the sky as God, unless such sayings are metonymical,⁴³¹ in which case the “sky” will be only a representative of God. One may identify this belief that the sky is God when the Akan points his or her forefinger toward the sky and says, *DeE Ohata soro hO yi nti menka hwee* (literally, “because of the one who spreads up there I will not say anything”).⁴³² It is common knowledge among Akan peoples that such a symbolic utterance is a reference to God as the only reason why an offended/hurting person is refusing to take revenge. In chapter 5, I will illustrate this with the biblical story of how Joseph forgave his brothers in Egypt.

It is important to point it out that Akans always refer to the stars in their collective referent *nsoroma* maybe because of the understanding that God does not only have one child. The Akan peoples believe that God has many children in the gods by whom He

⁴²⁹ We have to note that Christaller continuously translated “angels” as “osoro-abofo” (The Akuapim Twi; See Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion*. Bible This would have been so because Christaller’s translation was referring more to the ministry of Angels as messengers from God or heaven. “Abofo,” in the Akan language means messengers. Christaller was therefore doing a translation of “angels” by what they do as messengers who are sent from heaven to minister to children of God (see Hebrews 1:14; Daniel 10:5,12-14; 1 Chronicles 21:15, Gen. 28:12). “Osoro-abofo” could therefore, mean either “messengers of God” or “Messengers of heaven.”

⁴³⁰ Oduro-Mensah, *Akanism and Hebrewism: Akan-Mesopotamian Links and Earlier Civilization.*, 4-6.

⁴³¹ Lakoff and Johnson refer to metonymy as a figure of speech in which we use “one entity to refer to another that is related to it ... Metonymy ... primarily [serves] a referential function.” See, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., 2003), 35.

⁴³² See the Asante proverb: “Little children who lie sprawling on their backs looking up to the sky do not need to have it pointed out to them”, which Rattray records in R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti Proverbs: The Primitive Ethics Of A Savage People ()* (Kessinger Publishing, LLC (September 10, 2010), 1916), 24.

rules, sustains, or administers His creation. However, these stars as God’s administrative deputies are an issue that falls outside of the immediate occupation of this work. The reality is that, as Nkansah-Obrempong discusses, Akans believe that God has many children, the *nananom abosom*, who are his intermediaries between Himself and human beings.⁴³³ Therefore, the need or place for an intermediary between God and human beings has never been foreign within Akan religious cosmology. What is obviously required for Christianizing Akans is the construction of a theology of Christ’s exclusivity and indispensable uniqueness as mediator between God and human beings, and that will require an attitude and art like we encounter Paul displaying in Athens.⁴³⁴

The circle in the *Nyame ne hene* Adinkra Symbol for the traditional Akan means rule, kingship, greatness, authority, prudence, firmness, and magnanimity as in the Adinkra Symbol, *Adinkrahene* (see figure below).

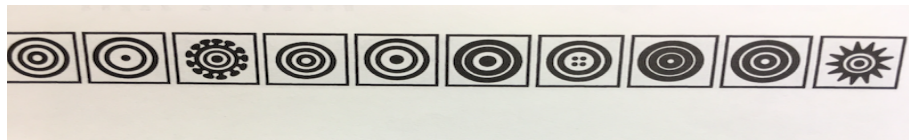


Figure 31
The shades of *Adinkrahene* Symbols⁴³⁵

The combination of the circle (“kingship”) and the *Gye Nyame* Symbol (“except God” Symbol) represents the omnipotence and omniscience of God.⁴³⁶ The symbol *Adinkrahene* is representative of the kingship of God for the Akan people, and this understanding of God’s power is an important characteristic across the African continent.

⁴³³ Nkansah-Obrempong, *Visual Theology*, 240.

⁴³⁴ Acts 17:16-34

⁴³⁵ Taken from Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary*, 62. It interesting to observe that the “Adinkrahene” is in three circles in a reducing order in each one of the one which comes before it. The theory that this is the Akan Symbol that shows the belief in the Trinity is known. However, that subject is not an immediate occupation of this dissertation.

⁴³⁶ Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, 1.

The *Adinkrahene* Symbol has three circles—a big outer one with a reduced one, and a further reduced one within it.

Interestingly, Rattray, Willis, and Achampong do not showcase the *Nyame ne hene* symbol. The absence of such a rich theological symbol in their writings seems to suggest that the *Nyame ne Hene*” Symbol is a later addition to the collection of the Symbols. I hinted in chapter 2 that people continue to create and add onto the number of Adinkra Symbols. Whatever the case may be, the *Nyame ne hene*” Symbol opens the doors for us to encounter the deep theological insights of the Akans regarding the kingship of *Nyankopɔn* (God), which I discuss below.

The Implications of the *Nyame ne Hene* Symbol

The *Nyame ne hene*” Adinkra Symbol is, therefore, not only pregnant with all of these understandings of who God is for the Akan people. The Symbol also displays the rich theological undergirding for the Akan people. I recognized that it might be necessary to point out that when Akans affirm and confess either verbally or with the Adinkra Symbol that *Nyame ne hene*, they mean that God is the ultimate ruler of the universe. As the ultimate ruler of the universe, God is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, most compassionate, and the deliverer of justice in all human conditions and situation.⁴³⁷ The *Nyame ne hene* Symbol is also for the Akan people the belief that God is the final arbiter in all cases of human encounters, as well as in all the challenges human beings face in life. In that understanding, the *Nyame ne hene* Symbol carries a

⁴³⁷ Achampong., 1. See Oduro-Mensah, *Akanism and Hebrewism: Akan-Mesopotamian Links and Earlier Civilization*, 4-8. See also, Nkansah-Obrempong, *Visual Theology*, 223-240.

message of joyful hope like Psalm 97:1 does for the Akan even before he or she becomes a Christian.

The belief that God is the ultimate ruler of the world is so consoling to an Akan person when people turn against him or her in hatred and persecution. When the Akan person says, “Nyame nkaa bi” (literally, “God has not endorsed what you are expecting to happen to me, or what you are trying to do to me”), he or she is affirming that whatever people want to do to harm him or her will require the approval of God as the ultimate ruler of the world for it to happen. Another consoling saying to the effect that God has the final say in all issues of human life is *atamfo nye nyame* [a ɛsɛ sɛ yɛfa dɛɛ wɔnom ka anibrɛ so]” (literally, “enemies or haters are not God [for us to take what they say seriously]”). It is not only Christians who use such proverbs. Both Christians and non-Christians use those proverbs owing to the religious inclinations of the Akans people, and the belief in the Supreme Beings as the ultimate controlling hand in all human affairs, even in Akan traditional religion.

Therefore, for the Akan person, the only thing another person can do his neighbor is the one that only God allows them to do. In other words, Akans believe that all human beings, including even powerful leaders and the spirits who are Nyankopon’s children, only act within the constraints of what Nyankopon allows them to do, and never beyond it. Like Job’s temptation, Satan, whenever he wants to attack the Akan, will not only need permission from God, but he will be able to attack them only within the limitation God gives him (Job 1:8–12; 2:2–7). Thus, by that symbol we identified that the Akan people have a rich understanding of this ultimate rule of God in the affairs of human beings surely is part of the reason Nkansah-Obrempong says:

the Akan concept of God can help recover a deep faith in a God who is trust-worthy and dependable, who cares and who alone can meet all our deepest needs in a world which is in flux and changing.⁴³⁸

The Similarity of the Akan Kingship of Nyankopon and God in the Bible

The Akan understanding of God vis-à-vis the concept of God in the Bible reveal remarkable similarities. Look at this conversation I had with the *Sumamanehene*.⁴³⁹ He had sent me a video of the *Munufie* Festival of the Suma people. The *Munufie* Festival is the annual celebration in which the Suma people thank the Ancestors and the gods for their good yam harvest. It is only after the festival that people are allowed to eat the new yam harvested that year.

[9:06 AM, 10/12/2017] **Kofi Amoateng**: Nana, sometimes like this festival, will it not be good to tell the story behind the festival? I guess festivals are metaphorical doors to opening the rich wisdom and values of Nananom gone before us to us as the succeeding generations.

Again, I think when you were talking about the need for unity, you could have used the “bi nka bi” Symbol as an artistic text of reference. That way, you could have kept the significance of not just the Adinkra Symbols, but also our traditional wisdom alive. These are suggestions from your nephew, Nana.

[9:07 AM, 10/12/2017] **Dr. Nana Kusi**:⁴⁴⁰ We did tell the history behind it, but that was not news to some media houses

[9:08 AM, 10/12/2017] **Kofi Amoateng**: Really? I think we still have a long way to go.

[9:09 AM, 10/12/2017] **Kofi Amoateng**: Anyway, it has to start somewhere by someone. Thank you for sharing

[9:09 AM, 10/12/2017] **Kofi Amoateng**: I loved your beautiful cloth.

[9:09 AM, 10/12/2017] **Dr. Nana Kusi**: Sure, I explained and even indicated that it's like the first fruit harvest festival in the Bible

[9:09 AM, 10/12/2017] **Dr. Nana Kusi**: Thanks

[9:10 AM, 10/12/2017] **Kofi Amoateng**: Wonderful! God bless you Nana

⁴³⁸ Nkansah-Obrempong, *Visual Theology*, 241.

⁴³⁹ It was a WhatsApp conversation (10/12/2017).

⁴⁴⁰ I have saved the Sumamanehene's name as Dr. Nana Kusi.

[9:11 AM, 10/12/2017] **Kofi Amoateng**: I believe we shall critically rediscover ourselves as a people in the world village soon

[9:13 AM, 10/12/2017] **Dr. Nana Kusi**: Sure, some of us have started and nothing can stop us

[9:14 AM, 10/12/2017] **Kofi Amoateng**: Amen. More grace to you. You have my support

[9:15 AM, 10/12/2017] **Dr. Nana Kusi**: This year I did not allow them to use wine during the festival, because I told my elders our Stool is far older than the coming of the white man so why do we say it's only schnapps that should be use for the ritual?

[9:26 AM, 10/12/2017] **Kofi Amoateng**: Bam ɔ! You are on the path to self-discovery. More grace and protection from the Lord to you, Nana.

[9:31 AM, 10/12/2017] **Dr. Nana Kusi**: So we use rain water instead

[9:32 AM, 10/12/2017] **Kofi Amoateng**: Waow! Did you have any opposition from your elders?

[9:32 AM, 10/12/2017] **Kofi Amoateng**: Can I use this illustration in my writings?

[9:33 AM, 10/12/2017] **Dr. Nana Kusi**: Yes. But they couldn't answer my question that what did nana use before the white man came and the answer was rain water

[9:34 AM, 10/12/2017] **Kofi Amoateng**: Hahahahahahahahahahaha so interesting. God bless you Nana. We need more of you.

[9:34 AM, 10/12/2017] **Kofi Amoateng**: I mean on our stools

[9:35 AM, 10/12/2017] **Dr. Nana Kusi**: I am humbled thanks, we need more prayers

[9:37 AM, 10/12/2017] **Kofi Amoateng**: It will be a very good illustration for the Matt. 19:8

[9:37 AM, 10/12/2017] **Kofi Amoateng**: We will pray for you.

[9:38 AM, 10/12/2017] **Dr. Nana Kusi**: Yeah, exactly

[9:40 AM, 10/12/2017] **Kofi Amoateng**: I have started thinking of an article "Our Ancestors we're not Drunkards: Reflections on Matt: 19:8 in Terms of Traditional Chieftaincy in Ghana"

[9:42 AM, 10/12/2017] **Dr. Nana Kusi**: Sure, they were using rain water to signify that God is pure and therefore anything apart from that is not pure for the black Stool

[9:43 AM, 10/12/2017] **Kofi Amoateng**: Waow! I am in the classroom without fees now! Thank you so much Nana.

[9:43 AM, 10/12/2017] **Dr. Nana Kusi**: You are welcome

The Akans root their understanding of the kingship of Nyankopon from the understanding that God is the creator and the real owner of and ruler over all of creation, as such that God deserves to be served the year's yam harvest first. The *Sumamanehene* was drawing attention to the reality Nyame as deserving to be honored with the first yam first when he said the *Munufie* Festival is like "the First Fruit harvest festival in the Bible." Again, the *Sumamanehene* makes it clear in the chat that Nyame (God) is extremely holy. His reason for directing the use of rainwater for libation is significant for the reason that "they were using rain water to signify that God is pure and therefore anything apart from that is not pure for the black Stool." I noted with interest that the *Sumamanehene* uses God and the black stool--the personification of the departed chiefs and kings, interchangeably. Surely, he does that because the person whose black stool it is was only an agent and steward of God. The Akans believe that human beings including kings, chiefs, and all leaders are His⁴⁴¹ stewards. The understanding that human leaders are God's stewards is partly carried in the *Nyame ne hene* ("God is the real king" Symbol).

From that understanding, Akans had a theology of the environment by which they protected and preserved their bodies of water as drinking water sources, and their vegetation. It was also by the same theology of environment that Akans kept their environments clean.

⁴⁴¹ In Akan religious cosmology God can be both male and female depending on why He/She is addressed. He can be "Agya" (= Father), King (= *ɔhene*). She can also be *ɔbaatanpa* (= the Good Mother) especially, when the Akan people are attributing to God as the caring provider of all human needs.

Adinkra Symbols with the Christian Cross: Why?

One may have to question why the Akans have had an image like the Christian cross in some of their religious symbols. It seems that a deeper research into why some of the religious Adinkra Symbols have images that look like the Christian cross in them is necessary. However, that is not the immediate occupation of this work. For instance, why do the *Mmusuyidee* and *Fihankra* Symbols all have the shape of the Christian cross?⁴⁴²

The Cross in the *Mmusuyidee*/*Krapa* Symbol

From the deep, albeit, adulterated historical theological past of the Akans, it is possible that the cross in the Adinkra Symbols reveal some form of contact between Akans and Christianity in their past. However, that will require further research to substantiate or refute. But, that is not the primary focus of this work. For instance, the understanding of the cross of the *Mmusuyidee* and the *Krapa* Symbols is nothing more or less than what the Christian cross symbol stands for—a symbol of atonement, of propitiation, forgiveness and reconciliation (Jn. 1:29; Heb. 9:28; 1 Cor. 15:3; Rom. 4:25). These are what the Akan *Musuyidee* and the *Krapa* signify. It can be used to communicate the reality of the Christian cross as that on which a savior died to take away the sins of the world and reconciles people to God.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have been discussing what the Adinkra Symbols meant for Akans in the early years of the Akan kingdoms. I have also shown how in contemporary

⁴⁴² The “*Mmusuyidee*” Symbol looks like the cross of St. Patrick.

times, Ghanaians have entextualized the Adinkra Symbols, as well as how they have applied the Adinkra Symbols to their new social and political contexts.

I argued that modernity does not necessarily mean a rejection of the traditions a people have inherited from their Ancestors. I proposed a theory that shows that a people always build on some of the values and traditions of the Ancestors in their search for new ways for dealing with contemporary challenges they face.

I have also discussed how the Adinkra Symbols help us uncover the religious dispositions of the Akan people and some of the implications of this religious undergirding for the Akan people.

In chapter 5, I have suggested how we can do the Adinkra symbolic theology for the Akan people. My research will provide a paradigm for using the Adinkra Symbols for teaching or doing theology in the Church. The purpose was to investigate whether we can submit the Adinkra Symbols as the creedal symbols that reveal the theology of the Akan people.

Chapter 5

Adinkra: The Connecting Rods to Christian Theology



Figure 32

Owuo kumm Nyame (“death killed God”)

Introduction

The *Owuo Kumm Nyame*” Adinkra Symbol started making meaning for me after I had had some theological education at the Master of Theology (MTh) degree level. I discovered the rich meaning of that symbol as part of my research for my thesis for MTh. Until then, it was difficult for me to reconcile, at least, the *Nyame nnwu na ma wu* and the *Owuo kumm Nyame* Symbols.



Figure 33

Nyame nnwu na mawu



Figure 34

Owuo kumm Nyame

The *Nyame nnwu na mawu* Symbol expresses the belief, literally, that “God does not die.” In the Akan understanding of God, the symbol affirms God as an eternal being. In what appeared as a contradiction to me, the *Owuo kumm Nyame*” Adinkra Symbol expresses the affirmation that God suffered death.

In the buildup to this chapter, I have been discussing why the study is important. I also suggested how this study is going to proceed in terms of the theoretical structure that was going to undergird the writing of this research. In chapter 2, I attempted to make meaning of the scattered historical pieces regarding the origins of the Adinkra Symbols. I identified synchronizing the scattered historical traditions for the creation of the Adinkra Symbols as necessary for identifying the reasons for their creation. I saw the stories behind the creation of the Adinkra Symbols as a necessary way to getting to know the meanings of the relevant symbols for this research. I needed to do that to be able to secure a paradigm for unearthing meaning of the Adinkra Symbols. In chapter 3, I discussed the reality that the Adinkra Symbols are texts that, and that like all texts, the Adinkra Symbols can be entextualized through different generations. When I discovered the Adinkra Symbols as texts, I identified the way for a discussion of how the Adinkra Symbols have gone through entextualizations through various generations of Akans in chapter 4. I also discussed how the Adinkra Symbols reveal the religiosity of the Akan people. All of that have provided the basis for the attempt to do Adinkra ethnotheology through Adinkra ethnohermeneutics.

In this final chapter (5), I will lead the discussions to suggest that we can do theology from the Adinkra Symbol for the Akans, as a contribution to the global discussions and for forms of theology for the universal Church. I have realized that this study would not be completed if I do not provide a paradigm for using the Adinkra Symbols for teaching or doing theology in Akan Churches. By this study, I believe that

all peoples whose worlds are “forests of symbols”⁴⁴³ can see this work as prototypical for doing theology ethnohermeneutically, via their symbols.

In this chapter, therefore, I will be discussing two main upshots. First, I will argue, like Walls, that Christian mission is about making converts, and not about making proselytes.⁴⁴⁴ In that submission, like Walls and Kraft, I will argue that a people’s culture does not have to be unnecessarily sacrificed on the altar of conversion to Christianity. I will also advance the argument that mission enterprises that ignore the cultural preparations of any receiving people will only achieve peripheral proselytes and will have to be dealing with “folk religions” and proselytes who may be not be well-versed in the Christian faith. Christians who are not well-versed in the faith, will only generate split-level Christianity. Again, such split-level Christians are the people Sarpong says are “like frogs who jump in and out of water as it suits them.”⁴⁴⁵ They jump in and out of water because they do not find answers to all the religious and social question of their worldview, and usually revert to their traditional religions for the answers, which the Church has not been able to provide for them.⁴⁴⁶

The second main interlocution that engaged this chapter was about how some of the creedal Adinkra Symbols can be used in ethnotheology for teaching in the Church. The use of the Adinkra creedal symbols for teaching in the Church was tested in my third field research in Ghana with much success according to the feedback I received from the focus groups. Let us look at the *Owuo kumm Nyame*” Symbol again.

⁴⁴³ Using the title of Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*.

⁴⁴⁴ Andrew Walls, ““Converts or Proselytes? The Crisis over Conversion in the Early Church,”” *Article Online*, 2004, 4.

⁴⁴⁵ Sarpong, *Peoples Differ*, 18.

⁴⁴⁶ Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 15-20.

Owuo kumm Nyame Adinkra Symbol

About the *Owuo Kumm Nyame* Symbol for instance, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, I could decipher the death-of-God communication in that symbol to the death of Jesus Christ of our Christian faith. The reason for that oversight was that, like many Christians in Ghana, I had been disciplined into believing that there was next to nothing in the Ghanaian culture that accommodated some knowledge of Jesus Christ. Therefore, I was not surprised when Akwasi Yeboah and some of the members of the Atwima Koforidua focus group told me that until I did ethnohermeneutics with the Adinkra Symbols, they considered the symbols as something for the gods. According to Akwasi Yeboah:

When former President Rawlings put the Gye Nyame Symbol on Ghana money, I was very skeptical. I asked myself why has he put something for the gods on our money? Does he not know Ghana is a Christian country?

What Akwasi Yeboah, like myself, did know until I did some theological education, was that when Akans speak of *Nyame* or *Nyankopɔn*, they mean the Supreme Being, the creator of all human beings and all creation. After all, how can *Nyame* (literally, the holistic satisfier) in the Twi Bible be different from *Nyame* in the Adinkra Symbol in the same language? What Akwasi Yeboah and surely, many other Ghanaian Christians therefore, need to know is that the analysis of *Nyame* or *Nyankopɔn* with the view to knowing and understanding what the Akan people believe about God, is as a theological analysis as doing the doctrine of God in the 16th century missionary inherited Churches.

Many proverbs indicate that there is the knowledge of God as the creator and sustainer of the universe in the consciousness of the average Akan. A proverb such as

Obi nkyerɛ abɔfra Nyame (literally, a child does not need anybody to teach him or her about the reality of God) heavily supports the submission that Akans know about God as the Research Officer at the Center of National Culture in Kumasi argued. It seems very credible that the *Obi nkyerɛ abɔfra Nyame* proverb was created from the Akan presupposition that the reality of God is inscribed in nature everywhere for even a child to observe and know. The Adinkra Symbol, *Gye Nyame*, is also another reality that lends credibility to the belief that Akan people have had some knowledge of God in their cosmology.⁴⁴⁷ That is why Achampong, for instance, boldly says, “Nyame (God), of the Akan is the creator and redeemer of the world, who reveals Himself in Scripture.”⁴⁴⁸ The idea that Achampong’s book had the Archbishop Emeritus Peter Akwasi Sarpong and Michael H. O. S. Monak, a scholar in African History and culture, endorse and write the foreword and preamble respectively for it, suggests the great support his work received in Ghanaian Church scholarship. However, how was I, like Akwasi Yeboah, to know that, some of the Adinkra Symbols open the gate to the deep theological discoursing, not only about the death of Jesus Christ, but also about the deep understanding regarding the divinity of Jesus? Obviously, if that Adinkra Symbol is “death killed God,” then the God in that name can only be Jesus Christ whom Christian doctrine teaches is God who died on the cross. Even if that understanding was not the original communication, it will be very reasonable to attribute to that Adinkra Symbol that new meaning, for the reason that there is no Akan God known to have died. It seems that it will be more difficult to

⁴⁴⁷ Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, ii. See also, James Nkansah-Obrempong, *Visual Theology: Some Akan Cultural Symbols, Metaphors, Proverbs, Myths, and Symbols and Their Implications for Doing Christian Theology* (VDM Verlag Dr. Muller, 2010), 202-203, 265-266.

⁴⁴⁸ Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, 1.

explain that the Nyame (God) in the name of the *Owuo kumm Nyame* Symbol is not Jesus, than to admit that it is a reference to Jesus, the Christ.

The experience Akan people gather from people explaining the historical origin, the reasons for the creations of the religious symbols like the *Owuo kumm Nyame* Symbol bring them to some conclusions. One of such deductions is that it is true that the nineteenth-century missionaries did not dialogue deeply enough with the Akan culture in general, and the Adinkra Symbols in particular. For instance, in the focus group interviews at Ashaiman and Atwima Koforidua in Ghana, the members of the groups told me that their understanding of Christianity would have been deepened if they had gotten a facilitator to explain the theological significance of the Adinkra Symbols for them like I was doing. Noted with significance was a contribution, which Kingsley Nsiah, a steward of the church at Atwima Koforidua, who had been a Christian for over thirty-five years made. He regretted: “the missionaries should have asked for help from the local people. If they had done that, they would have realized that there are many things in our culture, which they could have used to explain Christianity to us.”⁴⁴⁹ Akwasi Yeboah of the same Atwima Koforidua focus group became so excited about the use of the Adinkra Symbols for doing theology that he requested through their local minister that in every issue of the *Methodist Quarterly Bible Study* book, I should be given some of the weeks to write about the doctrines of the faith via the Adinkra Symbols. Akwasi Yeboah said with some obvious satisfaction: “Now I know that the symbols are not artifacts for idol worship.” Even though the understanding of the Adinkra Symbols as religious communications have not become dominant symbols in Ghanaian Christianity yet, many Churches have

⁴⁴⁹ Focus Group Atwima Koforidua, How can We do Theology with the Adinkra Symbols, 2016.

accepted them as symbolic theological pieces and displayed them in their chapels and cathedrals.

As I pointed out in chapters 1 and 4, if the sixteenth and nineteenth-century missionaries had considered the Akan cultural realities, they would have seen in the *Owuo kumm Nyame* Symbol, for instance, that God had been to the Akan people before them. They would have appreciated the reality that He (God) had bestowed His prevenient grace on the Akan people and made them ready for the reception of the Gospel by the provisions in their culture as avenue or a *preparatio evangelica* for Akan theological constructions. This would have made it easier for Akan converts to situate Christianity in their cosmology, and it would have brought about the deeper missionary-provoked transformation, which is the goal of effective missionary enterprises. With the realization of the deeper understanding of the symbols, Akans would have been facilitated toward the creedal processing of that symbol for the significance and the importance of the death of Christ for their salvation.

Owuo Kumm Nyame as a Creedal Symbol

The more my focus group participants experienced and understood the impregnated conceptual messages of the Adinkra Symbols, the more they became convinced that the Adinkra Symbols could have been the initial building blocks for the facilitation of deeper Christian mission among the Akan people of Ghana. For instance, Akwasi Yeboah of the Atwima Koforidua focus group and a retired lady teacher of the Ashaiman focus group, with support of the members of the focus groups requested that I write a book on the Adinkra Symbols to inform them of the histories behind the Symbols

as well as their meanings. It became obvious to them that the Adinkra Symbols were created to serve as creedal symbols for the Akan people.⁴⁵⁰

It was a missed opportunity, and regrettably so that earlier Church missionaries to the Gold Coast (and now Ghana), largely left such rich sources of doing theology, which is appropriate for the Akan context, relatively untapped. It is lamentable that for a long time, we did not come to terms with the reality that every theology needs a context. If we had known this reality at an earlier age, maybe Christianity may have relatively sunk deeper in the Akan understanding of the faith than it is now. I submit again that theology has to have a context (a home) for deeper appreciation among any people. The homing of theology is in fact crucial. Bevans comments:

There is no such thing as “theology”; there is only contextual theology: feminist theology, black theology, liberation theology, Filipino theology, Asian-American theology, African theology, and so forth ... The contextualization of theology—the attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context—is really a theological imperative.⁴⁵¹

What Bevans says in that context is a general reference to contextual theologies. Later in his book he specifies six different models of contextual theologies. The type of contextual theology that Bevans describes, which is relevant to this work, is the anthropological model. Bevans explains the anthropological model in terms of what this work seeks to do. It seeks to affirm the argument that a people’s culture has to be the receptacles of Christianity for them. Bevans’ compelling submission finds agreement with Walls’ translation and retranslation model.⁴⁵² According to Walls, the incarnation of Jesus Christ into the specific language and culture of the Jews is indicative of the

⁴⁵⁰ Peter Sarpong, “Foreword” in, Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, v.

⁴⁵¹ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 1.

⁴⁵² Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 26-28.

important upshot that God spoke a cultural language, which the Jews could understand. It was a paradigm of God translating Himself to a specific culture—a culture that had been prepared with a specific worldview and expectation for the Jewish people to be able to understand the language God spoke in His Son, Jesus Christ, to them.⁴⁵³ Walls calls this the translation model. Again, Walls explains that this translation of God into the Jewish culture, as the starting point for His mission among them, has seen many retranslations whenever the Church that started from Jerusalem and the subsequent expansions into new cultures. However, Wall cautions that in meeting the need for indigenizing the Christian faith among any culture-specific people, there has to be the need for a call a firm “loyalty to Christ.”⁴⁵⁴ He reminds the reader that the retranslations of the Christian faith in new cultures have meant that the Church has had to come up with new themes for Christianity whenever the Church encountered those new cultures.⁴⁵⁵ This is what one identifies in the history of the mission and expansion of the Church. Walls, therefore, contends that Christianity’s dialoguing with cultures of new peoples with whom the faith comes into contact with, which has been bringing up new themes for Christianity (his retranslation model), has to be the paradigm for doing mission for the Church. Significantly, Walls further points out that had it not been for the malleability and adoptability of Christianity in new cultures, which has always produced new themes—themes, which have ensured that Church continues to exist—the Church would not have continued to exist.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵³ Walls., 27-28.

⁴⁵⁴ Walls., 53-54.

⁴⁵⁵ Walls., 23.

⁴⁵⁶ Walls., 22.

The Anthropological Model of Contextual Theology

Now, I come back to the anthropological model of contextual theology for this work. Bevans, like Walls, points it out that “the primary concern of the anthropological model is the establishment or preservation of cultural identity by a person of Christian faith.”⁴⁵⁷ Bevans further explains, “In the context of the anthropological model ... the answer to the question as to whether one is aiming to become a Christian Filipino or a Filipino Christian is very definitely the former option.”⁴⁵⁸ For Walls, it is impossible to separate an individual from his or her social relationships, and thus from his or her society. Walls argues that this reality that people cannot be separated from their cultures has resulted in unvarying feature in Christian history, which has been the desire to “indigenize” the faith in new cultures (something he calls the indigenization principle).⁴⁵⁹ Again, he says that the indigenizing principle advocates that people do not have to leave their cultures before they can become Christian, but that they should be able to live as Christians, as well as members of their own societies.⁴⁶⁰ The indigenizing principle is advocated on the ruling of the first-century Church at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-32). The council dealt the challenge of whether gentiles who became Christians needed to start living as Jews for them to be Christian—proselytism. The meeting concluded with the policy that to proselytize people into Christianity would make it difficult for people to turn to God.⁴⁶¹ The import of the anthropological model, according to Walls, is that all Christian missions have to aim at converting people; and not at proselytizing

⁴⁵⁷ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Cultures*, 54.

⁴⁵⁸ Bevans., 54.

⁴⁵⁹ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 7.

⁴⁶⁰ Walls., 7.

⁴⁶¹ Acts 15:1-21

them.⁴⁶² However, I still submit that culture is the creation of human beings who are fallen. As much as the anthropological model is good for preserving the cultural identity of a people as they encounter Christianity, it also has to be in constant critical tension with the countercultural model.⁴⁶³ The countercultural model “draws on the rich and ample sources in Scripture and Tradition”⁴⁶⁴ to prophetically challenge anthropological presuppositions that are not Christian. The countercultural model is important for ensuring that culture is always evaluated for submitting it to loyalty to Christ throughout the changing epochs of a people. I have discovered in this research that a proper theological construction has to be an offspring of the marriage between the anthropological and the countercultural models of contextualization.

It is deducible, therefore, that theology has to be anthropologically contextual if it is ever going to find realistic expression and do away with the evolvment of folk religions. The need for anthropologically contextual theology is part of the issues that compelled me to create the theoretical model, which I refer to as semiotic anthropological ontology in chapter 1.

The driving understanding and motivation for that theoretical model is from the understanding that some aspects of culture are both God’s prevenient grace and serves as the *preparatio evangelica* for His mission among the culture-specific peoples around the world whom He wants to save and transform with their cultures. I hinted at this in the previous chapter. It seems that these realities of the indigenization and translation models for doing mission and theology was part of the reason why Henry Venn had argued that

⁴⁶² Walls, ““Converts or Proselytes? The Crisis over Conversion in the Early Church.”” 4.

⁴⁶³ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Cultures*, 54-61, 117-127.

⁴⁶⁴ Bevans., 117-132.

“the fullness of the Church would only come with the fullness of the national manifestations of different national churches.”⁴⁶⁵

If we adopt Geertz’s proposition that culture is a web of significance that human beings have woven around themselves, and the analysis of which is a search for meaning,⁴⁶⁶ then, in many instances, we can do appropriate contextual theology with the people of different cultures in the anthropological model. For that reason, I am going to devote the remainder of this chapter to showing how we can do a contextual theology in the anthropological model by the use of the Adinkra Symbol for the Akan people of Ghana.

***Owuo kumm Nyame* Symbol for Contextual Theology**

To discuss the *Owuo kumm Nyame* Symbol in terms of a creedal symbol will require some helpful changes in the light of the deeper Christian understanding we have as Akan theologians now. It seems right to submit that the name of that Symbols actually has to be elongated from *Owuo kumm Nyame*” to *Owuo kumm Nyame se deε ebeyε a nnipa benya nkwa* (literally, “death killed God to make it possible for human beings to have live life”). I submit that the elongation will bring significant imports to the Akan Christians and people.

We noted that Akans live in a world that is part of the anthropological universe, which Turner describes as the titles of his book “The Forest of symbols.”⁴⁶⁷ According to Éla, though Africa may be technologically deprived, she is extremely rich in signs and

⁴⁶⁵ Henry Venn, Instructions of the Committee of the Church Missionary Society to Departing Missionaries, June 30, 1868, reproduced in W. Knight, The Missionary Secretariat of Henry Venn (1880), 284.

⁴⁶⁶ Geertz, *The Interpretation Of Cultures*, 5-6.

⁴⁶⁷ Turner's title of his ground breaking book, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*.

symbols.⁴⁶⁸ He further explains that Africans have “a universe where all things speak, [where] signs play an important role in every socio-religious practice.”⁴⁶⁹ As Éla points out, Africa has “a civilization of symbols, in which, relationships between one human being and another and between human beings and nature, pass through the invisible, the symbolic place where all reality acquires meaning.”⁴⁷⁰ It is a world where “all is symbol.”⁴⁷¹ In such a symbolic world, the elongation of the name *Owuo kumm Nyame* Symbol to “*Owuo kumm Nyame sɛdɛɛ ɛbɛyɛ a nnipa bɛnya nkwa*” Symbol, will easily become a symbolic creed, as the creators may have intended it for. Akans will find that symbolic creed easy to interpret and to place within their symbolic religious tools for doing theology and for discipleship. All of this leads to the discovery that I realized during my research—the reality that Adinkra symbolizations for theology are highly appropriate contextual theological tools among the Akan people.

Contextualization a Necessity for Appropriate Theologization

Bevans points out that the need for contextual expressions of theology is crucial. It is therefore no wonder that African theologians are also engaging themselves to identifying appropriate contextual theologies for Africans. The African search for theological paradigms is an issue that Pobee alludes to.⁴⁷² Pobee explains:

African theology has been concerned to discover new and relevant symbols for describing the eternal Word of God so as to hold dialogue with African peoples. Therefore, it is attempting to move from the inherited language and idiom of the North to a new language and idiom relevant for Africa ... Insisting on local language, one is questioning the assumption associated with scholarship in the North that people

⁴⁶⁸ Éla, *My Faith as an African.*, 34.

⁴⁶⁹ Éla., 34-35.

⁴⁷⁰ Éla., 35.

⁴⁷¹ Éla., 35.

⁴⁷² Pobee, “Bible Study in Africa: A Passover of Language.” 164-165.

everywhere perceive reality in the same way and, consequently, there must be one and the same starting point for theological and biblical reflection.⁴⁷³

Pobee, thus, contends that instead of one starting point for theological reflections, theology from the different locales of the different peoples of the world must have different starting points. He further argues that the differences in epistemological appreciations must allow for appropriate theologies in different sociocultural locations around the world.⁴⁷⁴

I, as an insider, identified that the Adinkra Symbols constitutes cultural texts for doing appropriate contextual theology for the Akan people in the compelling observation of Pobee. As symbolic texts, I identified in the Adinkra Symbols the potential subjects for God's prevenient grace and as His pre-missionary preparation for the conversion of Akans. Why the early mission projects in Ghana could not dialogue deeply with cultural texts like the Adinkra Symbols for theology raises theological interlocutions. Bediako argues that missionaries to the Gold Coast in the sixteenth century did not engage themselves to contextual theology for African Christians because they did not trust that there could be something in the African culture that could constitute such subjects for God's prevenient grace.⁴⁷⁵ However, in that search for appropriate contextual theological paradigms, Kwame Bediako and Pobee, as well as many others including emerging younger theologians, are providing answers. For Pobee,⁴⁷⁶ the chieftaincy and the ancestral institutions of the Akans are realities that have prepared Akans for

⁴⁷³ Pobee., 164-165.

⁴⁷⁴ Pobee., 165.

⁴⁷⁵ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1996), 111.

⁴⁷⁶ J. S. Pobee, *Towards an African Theology* (Nashville, Tennessee: The Parthenon Press, 1979), 92-97.

Christological conversations. In his “Christ our Ancestor,” Bediako also critically advocates for a Christ-our-Ancestor Christology.⁴⁷⁷

My study is not necessarily limited to how to situate Christ in Christianity among Akans. It is more about how to use the Adinkra Symbols for general theological discussions. It considers one paradigm of a Christological issue in the *Owuo kumm Nyame* Symbol, but it also covers issues like how the Adinkra Symbols can help Akans to do a theology of the attributes of God in general theology.

I am submitting in this work that to do contextual theology, one first needs to understand the worldview of the people for whom he or she, as a missional theologian, is constructing the particular contextual theology. The understanding of the worldview of the people is important to facilitate the missionary toward identifying themes and cultural texts for doing the contextual theologies. Again, it is also important for the theology constructor to identify the types of contextual model(s) that will appropriately suit particular contexts. I am, therefore, going to affirm how to do a contextual theology for the Akans of Ghana by following the theoretical formwork, which I proposed for this work in chapter 1. In that theory, I suggested that if we unravel the meaning of the cultural text in the explanation that Geertz has given, and that explains that the analysis of culture is a search for meaning, to be able to discover what the Adinkra Symbols as cultural texts mean. I suggest that if we get to the meanings of cultural texts by an investigation of the stories behind those texts, we will be able to apply those meanings to doing contextual theologies. However, before I come to do that, I consider it necessary to explain key phrases that will be informing in that exploration.

⁴⁷⁷ See Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004).

In this chapter I have been pointing to the reality that the anthropological model of contextual theology will be very appropriate for the Akans of Ghana. However, since the Adinkra contextual theology (which is informed by Caldwell's ethnohermeneutics proposition) is relatively a new area of study, I will attempt to show how to do the Adinkra Symbol contextual theology in the anthropological model for Akans of Ghana by the use of the Adinkra Symbols from here.

Summary

I have shown that contextual theologies take the worldviews of peoples seriously for appropriate theological constructions. I have alluded to Walls' contention, for instance, that people do not have to leave their cultures before they become Christians. I have also shown the persuasion in agreement with Walls that Christian mission is about converting people, and not about proselytizing them.⁴⁷⁸ Furthermore, I have agreed with Walls that the history of the mission of the Church shows that the Church has continued to survive for the reason that as the Church's mission encountered new cultures, the Church has used the translation principle, for new themes, for the transmission and dissemination of the Christian faith. Again, I agree with Walls that without those new themes, which have continued to preserve the existence of the Church, the Church would have ceased to exist.⁴⁷⁹ The understanding of the translation principle becomes extremely required in doing contextual theologies, especially, the ones that adopt the anthropological model.

As Bevans shows in agreement: "the primary concern of the anthropological model is the establishment or preservation of cultural identity by a person of Christian

⁴⁷⁸ Walls, "Converts or Proselytes? The Crisis over Conversion in the Early Church." 4.

⁴⁷⁹ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 23.

faith.”⁴⁸⁰ In fact, I agree with Walls contention that cultural identities are prerequisites for making meaning of Christ and the Gospel.⁴⁸¹ However, I realize that an exclusive preservation of cultural identities may not be helpful to a critical evaluation of theologies. There is therefore, the need to evaluate the cultural model of doing theology with the countercultural model. An approach that employs and holds the cultural model and the countercultural models in dynamic tension will ensure that we do not sacrifice the Gospel’s universal application on the altar of cultural particularities. However, the reality that cultural identities may facilitate the deepening of Christian understanding among a people is what the Atwima Koforidua and Ashaiman focus groups reiterated. The comments of Kingsley of the Atwima Koforidua group, and the retired female teacher at Ashaiman were very significant in that regard. They concluded that the 16th century missionaries should have asked for help in deeper ways about the religious significance of the cultural realities of the Akan people. Again, according to them, if the missionaries had done that, they could have facilitated the settling the Christian faith in deeper ways in Ghana. It seemed to me that they were making the same point that this dissertation suspected and wanted to test.

Preamble to Adinkra Symbols, Ethnohermeneutics, and Contextual Theology

From the compelling expositions to the effect that cultures are necessary for making meaning of Jesus Christ and the Gospel for a people, it becomes equally compelling to use the Adinkra Symbols for contextual theology in the anthropological model as an ethnohermeneutical approach. However, as stated above, there will be the

⁴⁸⁰ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 54.

⁴⁸¹ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 27.

need for the countercultural model to be a check on excesses of the use of the anthropological model alone.

I have identified that the Adinkra Symbols hold a strong presence as religious instrument among the Akans. They are symbols that have prepared the Akans for the comprehension of who God is and what He has been doing for our understanding of the salvation in Jesus Christ. In that appendix 16, I am going to attempt to construct some of the attributes of God by the use of the Adinkra Symbols as an illustration of how to use the Adinkra ethnohermeneutics for Adinkra theology.

Church-related scholarship have significantly discussed the reality that we can and have to use symbols for African theological enterprises in contemporary times among. For instance, we need to hold the comment of Éla, which I pointed to earlier in chapter 1. In that chapter I said that Éla described the African universe as one of symbols, and that is significant.⁴⁸² Again, Sarpong, as I mentioned in chapter 1, has argued that there is the need for those who preach in Africa to realize that contextualization is extremely important so they do not preach in Western cognitive, reasoning, and logic terms.⁴⁸³ According to the archbishop, those who preach in Africa must do the transmission of the Christian faith through African cognitive terms, which employs externals such as “gestures, symbols, and signs, which depict some innermost realities for the African persona.”⁴⁸⁴ In another direction, Pope John Paul II has made a persuasive call on the Church in Africa about the need to take the contextualization of

⁴⁸² Ela, *My Faith as an African*., 35.

⁴⁸³ Peter Sarpong, ““What Church, What Priesthood for Africa?”” in *Theological Education in Africa: Quo Vadimus?* J.S. Pobee and J.N. Kudadjie (Accra: World Council of Churches and Asempa Publishers, 1990), 6-17.

⁴⁸⁴ Sarpong., 11-12. Emphasis mine.

theology for African seriously. According to the Pope, ““A serious concern for a true and balanced inculturation [or contextualization] is necessary in order to avoid cultural confusion and alienation in our fast evolving society.”” He further charged, “I put before you a challenge—a challenge to reject a way of living which does not correspond to the best of your traditions, your Christian faith. Many people in Africa look beyond Africa for the so-called ‘freedom of the modern way of life.’” Then he urged African theologians to begin to look to the riches of their own traditions, where according to him, they will find true freedom, and find Christ who leads them to the truth.”⁴⁸⁵

By these comments of Éla, Sarpong, and Pope John Paul II, we get the intimation that the drive to mainstream the adoption of symbols for intercultural theological enterprises in Africa in general is gaining important attention and call.

One, however, needs to recognize that symbols in Africa are not limited to artifacts. When Ghanaians, for instance, talk of symbols, they mean more of symbols that “can have a set of meanings that can neither be exhausted nor adequately expressed by any one referent.”⁴⁸⁶ I noted that in a lot of the instances symbols refer to more than one reality. Even language as a symbol in Ghana can mean more than one issue. For instance, when an Akan says *meda wase*, it may mean something that simply corresponds to the English “thank you.” However, in the Akan language, *meda wase* means something deeper than the ordinary “thank you” in English. The Akan *meda wase* can also mean a strong disapproval for something that has been wrongly done—something that might have caused the person expressing the *meda wase* some great destruction. In instances like

⁴⁸⁵ Paul, John II, “Post Synodal Address.” http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_14091995_ecclesia-in-africa.html (January 10, 2017), Number 48.

⁴⁸⁶ Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*.

that, *meda wase* becomes sarcastic and may even reveal the intention to revenge. Again, *meda wase* can imply what it literally implies—prostrating before a benefactor for some huge good done for the person who is expressing the *meda wase*, and not just “thank you.” In such a case, *meda wase* will mean, “I prostrate before you,” for that is what it literally means in the Akan language. We may have to assume that this is part of the reason why traditionally the king of Asante does not tell anybody *meda wase* in appreciation for services done to the Asante nation or his personal self, and only expresses *mo* (literally, “well-done”). In such tensive understanding of symbols, with the ability to cover more than one meaning—an issue of symbols that Victor Turner, refers to in symbolic rituals as a “condensation” property of symbols⁴⁸⁷—is how we are going to be employing symbols in our construction of theological issues in this chapter.

How to Construct the Adinkra Symbolic Theology

In chapter 3, I introduced the method for doing the Adinkra theology. I mentioned that I employed an ethnohermeneutical approach to doing Adinkra theology. I mentioned that in this type of ethnohermeneutics, I used Akan symbols and the stories behind them, which point the investigator to an innermost reality, as the hermeneutical tool. I also mentioned that for me as an Akan, these stories behind the Adinkra Symbols are the pointer to the communicated issues about God, salvation, Christian attitude to life, relationships, and economics among many others in Christian scriptures. The symbolisms of stories, poetry, songs, human persons, and even names in the scriptures that reveal issues about God to me and bring me the understanding of God. I need such an understanding of God for the closer walk with God and for a growth in my knowledge

⁴⁸⁷ Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, 29-30.

of Him for life and all forms relationships and activities and how I have to respond to them—the imperatives of theology, without which no theology is necessary.

It is the attempt/investigation of how to get meaning from the Adinkra Symbols that relate me to an understanding of God for appropriate responses in how I live to please God and enrich my relationships to people and socioeconomic issues, which I call Adinkra ethnohermeneutics. Such an approach, I contend, is what is necessary for planting Christianity in deeper ways among the Akans of Ghana.

Using the *Fihankra* Symbol to Illustrate Adinkra Ethnohermeneutics

To get to the meaning of the Adinkra Symbols was a major part of the reason for this research; such an investigation has to be the main route towards finding meanings hidden in the Adinkra Symbols. It was the reason for which I interviewed the *Sumamanhene*; Archbishop Emeritus Peter Sarpong; the research officer at the Center for National Culture in Kumasi; the Adinkra cloth producers at Ntonso; the focus groups at Atwima Koforidua, Ayigya Methodist Churches in Kumasi, and at St. Peter's Methodist Church in Ashaiman; and the other people mentioned in this work. Let me begin by looking at the *Fihankra* Symbol.



Figure 35
Fihankra Symbol

Interestingly, the five participants in the Atwima Koforidua ethnohermeneutical group brought up some important issues regarding the theology of family security with regard to the *Fihankra* Symbol, which I had advanced in my teaching. For instance, mentioned the following:

First, they discussed that the *Fihankra* Symbol, which has the impression of the cross at the center of what looks like a home, seems to carry a message. Second, Faustina Agyemang observed that the Symbol actually says something about the cross for the home.⁴⁸⁸ Third, Kingsley pointed out that “since the impression of the home unusually does not have an entrance, the Symbol seems to carry the idea of an impregnable *fie* (“home”).” “Home” is another referent for the family among Akans. “Me rekɔ fie” (literally, “I am going home”) can also mean “I am going to my family, as meaning the people who accept me as their own.” Therefore, if the home image in the Adinkra Symbol has an image that looks like cross, then the cross must be saying something about the home. *Hankra* (“ring”) itself is a symbol of security, except that in this *Fihankra* Symbol, there is a cross, which is the symbol for the Church, Jesus, the blood of Jesus, and so on for the Akan people. At that point, Sister Agyemang, the female teacher in the group said, “Since Osofo has been explaining that our ancestors might have known God, the cross may mean the blood of Jesus, which cover the Christian for protection.”⁴⁸⁹ Therefore, all of us concluded that the *Fihankra* Symbol communicates the rhetoric that when a family has the Church or Christ at the center, they will have security, and therefore, be freed from the pervasive fear of the witches and wizards among the Akan people. They also concluded that such Christian family shall also be freed from the powers of negation that threaten human survival and development in Akan cosmology. Such an understanding of the *Fihankra* Symbol is in agreement with Willis and

⁴⁸⁸ Atwima Koforidua, "How can We do Theology with the Adinkra Symbols."

⁴⁸⁹ Faustina Agyeman, Atwima Koforidua.

Achampong,⁴⁹⁰ among many others, explanation that the *Fihankra* Symbol is a symbol of security. The addition to the meaning, which we made, was the element about the significance of the cross at the center of the Symbol. However, this addition is reasonable for the need to come up with theology for dealing with contemporary issues for a people.

I have discussed the theory that a people may add meanings to the traditions their ancestors left for them as a way of dealing with contemporary challenges of their times in chapter 3. I must mention, however, that I provided the direction in the discussions—a reason I will explain later under missional implications in this chapter.

When we had all agreed on the theological significance of the *Fihankra* Symbol as communicating security in Jesus, the Christ, Kingsley Nsiah commented, “This Fihankra Symbol is so rich with issues for dealing with our fears.” I then looked through the scriptures for texts and passages that express God as the source of security. The following were some of the texts that I discovered and used in my articulation of the security in Jesus, the Christ for both social families and the Church as the *oikos* family of God: Exodus 12:13;⁴⁹¹ Deuteronomy 31:6;⁴⁹² and Isaiah 41:10.⁴⁹³ The others were Psalm 12:5; Psalm 34:19; Psalm 138:7; 1 Peter 1:5; and 2 Thessalonians 3:3.

⁴⁹⁰ Willis, 106-107, Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, 29. As mentioned earlier, Achampong says that the Fihankra Symbol is a “Symbol of Security and Shelter.”

⁴⁹¹ “The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.”

⁴⁹² “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

⁴⁹³ “So, do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

We concluded that the *Fihankra* Symbol communicates the cover of the protection of God, which comes over all who become members of the Church, and all who make their homes Christian homes. The members of the focus group noted that the understanding of what those who make their home/families Christian families achieve is well articulated in one of the songs that the Women's Fellowship of the Methodist Church in Ghana has written and sings to encourage themselves toward making their families Christian families.

Twi	English Translation
<i>Ɛye mmaakuo yen asedee se yebesua adɔye</i>	It is expected of the members of the Women Fellowship to learn to become generous.
<i>Ɛye mmaakuo yen asedee se yebesua abotre</i>	It is expected of the members of the Women Fellowship to learn to become patient.
<i>Ɛye mmaakuo yen asedee se yebesua ahumɔboro</i>	It is expected of the members of the Women Fellowship to learn to become merciful.
<i>Meye fie Kristo fie</i>	I will make my home/family a Christian home.
<i>Ama me kunu aye Kristoni</i>	So that my husband will become a Christian.
<i>Ama me mmɔfra aye Kristianfo</i>	And then my children will become Christians.
<i>Meye fie Kristo fie</i>	I will make my home/family a Christian home.

The *Fihankra* Symbol, therefore, seems to give the assurance that when Christ is the savior of an extended family, and He is at the center of that family's life, they find God's salvation, protection, prosperity, and a in fact, good life in general. As Nana

Bonsie, the chief of Ehwimase, in the Kwabre District of Ghana told me, “What is better than having Kristo as the center of the ‘Abusua’ (literally, the extended family)?”⁴⁹⁴

Adinkra Symbolic Theology of the Sovereignty of God

I discovered after reading Caldwell’s article, “Ethnohermeneutics” that if I use the proposed Adinkra ethnohermeneutical approach, it will be possible to rediscover the faith of the Ancestors of the Akans. I will discuss some of the doctrines from here. I am using three Symbols to reveal the Akan belief in the sovereignty of God. These are:



Figure 36
Gye Nyame



Figure 37
Hye wo a anhye

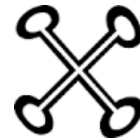


Figure 38
Nyame nwu na mawu

The first of the symbols that I am using is the *Gye Nyame* Symbol. I will follow that Symbol with the *Hye wo a anhye* Symbol; and finally, I will discuss the *Nyame nwu na mawu* Symbol.

The *Gye Nyame* Symbol



Figure 39
Gye Nyame

⁴⁹⁴ Dwamena Nana Bonsie, "The Akan Family and the Effects of Christianity." (May 30, 2016).

Achampong makes the case in the early part of his discussion of the *Gye Nyame* Symbol saying, “Our forefathers had high esteem for the creator, *Nyame*, and without Him nothing was possible.” Willis has a picture of the *Gye Nyame* Symbol on one of the early sheets of his book. Under the Symbol he has quoted a part of an Akan praise oration about the Symbol. He wrote:

*Abɔdeɛ santan yi firi tete; obi nte ase a onim
N’ahyase, na obi ntena ase nkosi n’awie, Gye Nyame*

Willis translates this part of the oration or *nɔwomkorɔ* (a type of Akan folk music, which a female singer leads in the singing for other females to respond to) as the following:

*This great panorama of creation dates back to time
immemorial, no one lives who saw its beginning, and
no one will live to see its end, except God.*⁴⁹⁵

Nana Osei Kofi, the son of a late *Antoahene*⁴⁹⁶ explained to me that the oration is an attribute about the eternal nature of God. According to him, Akans believe that God has no beginning and He has no ending. Unlike human beings, even powerful kings, who promise to protect the people of their kingdoms only to die and leave the people vulnerable, *Nyankopɔn* never dies and will continue to outlive all human beings. The Akan people understand the *Gye Nyame* Symbol in those terms. “No one will live to its end except God,” is what the Symbol communicates for the Akan people. When the Akans, by the *Gye Nyame*, affirm the belief in *Nyankopɔn* as the God who does not die, they are also affirming His invincibility. The logic seems clear: One who can be conquered cannot be said to live forever. The oration about the *Gye Nyame* also

⁴⁹⁵ Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary*, iv.

⁴⁹⁶ Antoahene means the chief of Antoa.

attributes creation to *Nyankopɔn*. He is the *abɔdeɛ santan* (Willis translates it as “this great panorama of creation”) who is God Himself. For instance, in a far earlier age, Danquah had argued that the *Nyankopɔn* of the Akans is the same Jehovah of the Hebrews.⁴⁹⁷ As the eternal invincible creator⁴⁹⁸ of the whole universe, Akans believe, as I explained in chapter 4, that He is the one who is omniscient and has the final say in all issues of life.

According to Nana Osei Kofi, Akans believe that these attributes of God are what make them believe that He is not the only dependable one, but also that He is the only true refuge or fortress to whom people have to run to if they ever need protection from their enemies. As Achampong concludes, with a quotation from Matthew 6:26, 31–33, *Nyankopɔn* (or *Nyame*) is the One with whom worrying is a useless exercise.⁴⁹⁹

In chapter 2, I pointed out that my informants told me that Nana Kwadwo Adinkra created the *Gye Nyame* Symbol in recognition and appreciation of *Nyankopɔn*’s protection and preservation for Nana Adinkra himself and the people who migrated with him throughout their migration from Suntresu in Kumasi to the Gyaman Kingdom then. I mentioned there that the symbol was created in appreciation of *Nyankopɔn*’s protection and sustenance though all the six wars the Asantes fought with them but never defeated them according to the *Sumamanhene*. He says that in all the six wars the Gyamans were neither defeated once. The *Gye Nyame* Symbol was created for expressing this historical reality that Nana Adinkra and the Gyamans experienced of *Nyankopɔn*. It was intended

⁴⁹⁷ Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion*, 36-40.

⁴⁹⁸ Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, 1.

⁴⁹⁹ Achampong., 1.

to provoke continuous praise among the Gyamans for God for his sustaining grace over the Gyaman people and the Gyaman Kingdom.

What Willis expresses in his book⁵⁰⁰ about the *Gye Nyame* Symbol therefore, finds agreement with the reason why Nana Adinkra would create the *Gye Nyame* Symbol. The Symbol was created, as mentioned above, to partly recognize and give thanks to *Nyankopɔn* as the One who graciously kept the Gyamans and their kingdom from the possible annihilation by the Asantes.

From this journey into history, as I recounted, the Atwima Koforidua focus group, came to the conclusion that the *Gye Nyame* rhetoric attributes to God as eternal, unconquerable protector, who alone has the final say when it comes to prospering people, and protecting people and uplifting those who are vulnerable. *Nyankopɔn* does all these as the One who saves all those who have Him as their God from those who seek to destroy their lives. Faustina Agyeman even asked about why the *Gye Nyame* Symbol is not on Ghana's flag in place of the black star? Scholars have continued to interpret the *Gye Nyame* Symbol as "except God."⁵⁰¹ As Willis says, the *Gye Nyame* Symbol "represents the mundane concept of the belief in the supremacy of God in the Ghanaian Society."⁵⁰² He identified that the *Gye Nyame* Symbol "refers principally to the greatness of God and it also reflects God's power over all His creation."⁵⁰³ According to Nana Osei Kofi, that is why the *Gye Nyame* Symbol is so popular with Akans in particular and Ghanaians in general. Nana Osei Kofi's observation that the *Gye Nyame* Symbol is very popular with Ghanaians proved to be true during the focus groups interviews I conducted.

⁵⁰⁰ Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary*, 114-115.

⁵⁰¹ Willis., 114.

⁵⁰² Willis., 114

⁵⁰³ Willis., 114

I discovered that all the participants knew about the *Gye Nyame* Symbol. However, about some of the other Adinkra Symbols, some of the participants in the focus groups told me they were hearing about them for the first time.

Therefore, the principal rhetoric, which the *Gye Nyame* speechifies, is that God alone is the one who can either destroy or raise people. Therefore, if God has not said people should die, no one can kill them. As the Akan proverb says: *Nyame nkum wo a ɔteasefoɔ yɛ kwa* (literally, “if God has not said you have to die, no matter what any person living does, he or she will be tiring himself/herself for nothing—they cannot kill you”). I am compelled to deviate to make an essential understanding of African theology as Pobee has observed. Commenting on the characteristics of African theology, Pobee shares his observation that *homo africanus* has a communitarian epistemology and ontology. He points out:

There is a compatibility between the Old Testament and African culture lying in a common outlook on life and human experiences, which results in a common experience of reality in such areas as sacred and profane, humanity and community, humanity and nature, sin and disease.⁵⁰⁴

Pobee puts words to an observation that is true also of the Akan epistemology and ontology. As an insider, who is also a Christian theologian, I see the compatibility that Pobee describes in these words. Therefore, when the Akan theologian finds illustrations and concepts in his or her reading of the Bible and identifies that they are similar to realities in the Akan culture, he or she knows that what he or she is intimating is deeper than what a person from the North can appreciate. For this reason, the Akan people can easily draw similarities between texts of Scripture and African cultural texts. For instance, the Akan theologian can easily identify similarities from this understanding

⁵⁰⁴ Pobee, “Bible Study in Africa: A Passover of Language.” 166

from the *Gye Nyame* rhetoric and biblical stories like the story of Joseph and the hatred he suffered from his own brothers and how God made him become the prime minister of Egypt. The climax of the Joseph story for the Akan from the understanding that the *Gye Nyame* rhetoric carries is captured in Genesis 50:20:

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

The average Akan person who receives the treatment of wickedness, like Joseph, does not have to be a Christian to respond to the brothers in the way Joseph responded to his brothers, as cited above. Surely when they respond like Joseph did, it will be because of the belief in the sovereignty of God and not necessarily because any Christian Church education teacher taught them. The response will be from what issues like the *Gye Nyame* rhetoric has been teaching them. I tested this with two men at Kotwi in Kumasi. They both agreed that the time when Joseph was going through the issues of hatred would have been very difficult for him. They thought that Joseph would have hated their brothers for it. However, after God had raised him to the office of the prime minister of Egypt, they would have considered it as God's way of shaming their brothers, so they could have said what Joseph told the brothers. One of them even said it in a proverb, *Sε Nyame ko ma wo wie a aden nti na ewɔ sε wo ha wo ho ko bio?* (literally, "if God defeats your enemies for you, why do you have to fight again?"). It may be interesting to realize that though the responders were not Christians, they kept attributing the reasons for not taking the option of vengeance to God. They believed that in instances like that God is the one who was fighting for the offended.

The Atwima Koforidua focus group agreed that another story of the Bible that is compatible with that Akan understanding of God, and that will encourage the Akan Church member in a situation of suffering, is the story of Job.⁵⁰⁵ In that story one notes that Satan was able to do harm to Job as far as God allowed him to do. First, God permitted Satan to destroy whatever Job had. We have to note that Satan confessed that he had not been able to harm Job because God had put a hedge around Job himself, his family, and whatever Job owned (Job 1:10). In a second attack on Job, Satan asks for permission to attack Job again, and God gives him permission to attack the physical body of Job. God told Satan that He was not giving him permission to take Job's life. We recognize that Satan did his worst, but he was not able to take Job's life. For the Akan, the reason for this will be that it was because God had not given Satan permission to take the life of Job—they whole Job story is a symbol that tells the story that ultimately sovereignty is with God. The *Gye Nyame* Symbol communicates a similar understanding of the sovereignty of God for the Akan. For the Akan who understands the *Gye Nyame* Symbol, Nyankopɔn alone is the one who has the final say in all issues of human life.

From this traditional creed, Nana Adinkra again created the *Hye wo anhye* Adinkra rhetoric to communicate the belief that the only person who has the power of destruction and can allow or permit the destruction of those who trust in Him is *Nyankopɔn*.

⁵⁰⁵ Job 1:6-10, 2:1-6.

The *Hye wo a Anhye* Symbol



Figure 40
Hye wo a anhye

We will have to take the ethnohermeneutical approach again to get to the meaning of the *Hye wo a anhye* Symbol. Again, we will do that by consulting the books written on the Adinkra Symbols, and also by consulting Akans who know the meanings of the Adinkra Symbols like chiefs, elders of the Akan communities, and so on.

Willis says that the *Hye wo a anhye* literally translates as “you can burn them, but they won’t burn.”⁵⁰⁶ Willis’ translation is in the plural. The name of that Symbol however, is in the singular; it speaks to an individual. Therefore, the direct translation will be “others can burn you, but you will not burn.” It is an affirmation that says, “others may try to burn you, but you will not burn.” From that understanding, is why Willis says that Symbol communicates indestructibility. Willis further explains that the Symbol “means toughness, durability, or permanence. It speaks about surviving in the world.”⁵⁰⁷ According to Achampong, who calls it *Hye woa enhye*,⁵⁰⁸ it is a symbol of protection. For Achampong, the Symbol carries the message of the Bible in Isaiah 43:2:⁵⁰⁹

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.

⁵⁰⁶ Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary*, 119.

⁵⁰⁷ Willis, 119.

⁵⁰⁸ Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, 8.

⁵⁰⁹ Achampong., 8. The version of the Bible I have cited here is not the version Achampong used.

He compares the *Hye wo a anhye* rhetoric to this biblical text, because for him, they mean the same message. When I speak about Adinkra ethnohermeneutics that is what I mean. It is about identifying a communication in the scriptures and looking for a similar communication in an Adinkra Symbol to make meaning for the Akan people.

At Atwima Koforidua in Kumasi, the participants of the focus group told me that there is a grass-like plant on their farms, which the Asantes call “hye wo a anhye.” They told me that if people uproot the plant and put it even on a fallen tree, they always come back the following day to find that the plant has raised itself up, and will be standing again as if nothing happened to it the previous day. According to them, that plant has the quality of indestructibility, and that is why it is called *Hye wo a anhye*. The participants of that focus group told me that the *Hye wo a anhye* Symbol speaks about the idea that one cannot be destroyed. Like Achampong, they agreed among themselves that *Nyankopɔn* alone is the One who can make a person indestructible. They argued that if somebody ignores *Nyankopɔn*, and seeks protection from the traditional gods, they always disappoint them. They also told me that when the gods disappoint those who come to them like that, they give excuses for why they stopped protecting their clients. They often say things like their clients faulted in the rules they gave them to observe, and that is why their enemies got them. Sometimes they even say that the gods killed the clients themselves for the same reasons. By that explanation, they were agreeing among themselves that only *Nyankopɔn* alone can make people indestructible. The addition of the *Hye wo a anhye* Symbol and the *Gye Nyame* Symbol communicates the religious

understanding that true protection and the true assurance of the fulfillment of one's destiny lies in and with God's approval.

The *Nyame nwu na mawu* Symbol



Figure 41

We will again follow the same story sharing paradigm for getting to the rhetoric of the *Nyame nwu na mawu* Symbol. Literally, this Symbol translates as Willis translates it, "God dies, I shall die. But since God does not die, I shall not die."⁵¹⁰ Willis helped us understand the deep implication of that symbolic rhetoric by rendering the translation inversely, and said it implies, "God dies, I shall die."⁵¹¹ The research officer at the Center for National Culture, agrees with Willis on what the Symbol communicates. According to the research officer, the Symbol implies that it will require the enemies of those who put their trust in God to kill God first before they will be able to kill those who put their faith in God.

For Achampong, the message of the *Nyame nwu na mawu* Symbol is similar to the Paul's assurance in Romans 8:1–2:⁵¹²

There is no condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit, which brings us life in union with Christ Jesus, has set me free from the law of sin and death.

⁵¹⁰ Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary* 163.

⁵¹¹ Willis., 163.

⁵¹² Achampong, *Christian Values in Adinkra Symbols*, 3.

Again, Achampong says that this understanding of the *Nyame nwu na mawu* rhetoric resonates a confirmation of what the Lord says in John 11:25, “I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me, will live, even though he dies, and whoever believes in me will never die.”⁵¹³ From the aforementioned interpretation of the Symbol, it seems to me that it captures the Paul’s conviction, which he articulates in Colossians 3:3: “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” *The Ellicot’s Commentary for English Readers* explains the “your life is hidden with Christ in God” in the Colossians 3:3 text as:

First, “our life is hid with Christ in God.” The spiritual life in man is a “hidden life,” having its source in God; the full conviction of it, as distinct from the mere instinctive consciousness of it in the mind itself, comes only from the belief that it is the image of God in us, and is sustained by constant communion with Him. If God be our God at all, we must live; for “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”⁵¹⁴

From the reality that Akans die from time-to-time like all human beings, it does not seem likely that Akans by the *Nyame nwu na mawu* rhetoric imply that when people trust in God (or Jesus Christ), they will never die. As Sarpong acknowledges, “As human beings, ... we will all one day die.”⁵¹⁵ It seems that the actual communication of the Symbol is that when someone has trusted in God, though she or he may die physically, he or she will never die spiritually as an eternal separation from God.

All of these three Adinkra Symbols put together communicate the faith of Akans via Adinkra symbolization. I can say that they communicate the creed of the Akans regarding the sovereignty of God because of the understanding I gleaned from H. W.

⁵¹³ Achampong., 3.

⁵¹⁴ Charles J. Ellicot, *Ellicot’s Commentary for English Readers* (September 27, 2015: www.DelmarvaPublications.com, n.d.).

⁵¹⁵ Sarpong, *Peoples Differ*, 39.

Turner. According to Turner, human beings create a model to represent their experiences of God because of the limitedness of our memories, as I explained in chapter 1.⁵¹⁶ In the research interviews with the *Sumamanhene*, one issue that came to the surface was the issue that Nana Adinkra created the symbols from his experiences of God. Thus, the symbols were created to immortalize the religious experiences of Nana Adinkra for the benefit of Akan generations after him. These are the reasons why we can conclude that the symbols were the representations of the creeds of the Akans.

Another observation of Archbishop Emeritus Peter Sarpong seems relevant here. Sarpong's description of the Akan spiritual cosmology is a helpful starting point. As the Archbishop Emeritus describes it:

On one side are the divinities, on the other the ancestors and on the base are other aspects of traditional religion, such as morality, witchcraft, sorcery, taboo, totemism, medicine, mystical beings and forces, etc. ... witches and sorcerers are people who are supposed to possess extraordinary powers for causing harm to others ... the magician is somebody who uses words and objects to effect extraordinary things ... the magician is believed to be able to take say bread, pierce it with needles and say: *when 'X' eats bread, may she develop stomach cancer*. It is believed that whether the magician is near the victim or not, when the victim eats bread she will have the stomach problem.⁵¹⁷

Akan Christians, therefore, believe in religion that offers them protection from such wicked spiritual forces. This is an issue that is extensively discussed in a book (published posthumously) of a collection of essays, which was dedicated to the memory of C.G. Baeta.⁵¹⁸ For this reason, my focus groups greatly appreciated the sermons on the

⁵¹⁶ H. W. Turner, "A Model for the Structure of Religion in Relation to the Secular," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 27 (1979): 42–64, 42.

⁵¹⁷ Sarpong, *Peoples Differ*, 94-95, 99-100.

⁵¹⁸ C. G. Baeta, *Prophetism in Ghana: A Study of Some "Spiritual" Churches* (Ghana, Achimota: Africa Christian Press, 2004).

sovereignty of God, which I used the Adinkra Symbols to outline and preach. I will want to conclude this chapter by writing out the outline of the preaching I did on the sovereignty of God in the focus groups' Churches before the interviews and reviews with them in Appendix 16. However, before I come to the outline, let me discuss some missional implications discovered in my research.

Missional Implications

I discovered that members of the Church in Ghana, largely, are used to being spoon-fed when it comes doing theology. They expect their pastors to do theologies for them. This was so evident in the focus group interviews. The requests of Akwasi Yeboah whom I mentioned earlier in this chapter, and one other request, which I will be telling about in the next paragraph show the extent to which Ghanaian Christians expect their pastors to be the ones who are doing theologies for them. However, I believe that if pastors will encourage people of the Church in Ghana and challenge them to see themselves, even as non-literate theologians, and will contribute to do theological discourses with their trained pastors it will contribute tremendously to the development of the Church in the following ways among others.

First, it will not only bring down theological discussions from the Church's ivory towers where only seminary-trained pastors engage in theological constructions, which ordinary members of the Church find, in most instances, very difficult to relate to. Second, if pastors do theological analyses with the inclusion of ordinary non-literate members of the Churches, it will facilitate the bringing of the processes in doing theology into the arena of the ordinary Church members and make it easier for them to live the

theologies in their concrete life situations. Again, the theological collaboration between literate pastors and non-literate Church members will help deepen the understanding of the Christian faith for themselves. At least, the focus group interviews seem to have pointed in that direction. The following story will illustrate the observations undergirding this recommendation.

At Ashaiman, a female participant of the focus group, the retired educationist I mentioned earlier, requested that I write a book on the theology of the Adinkra Symbols for Methodist mission schools. According to her, “Such a book will not only deepen the appreciation of the symbols, but that it will also contribute immensely to making Christianity more meaningful to our children.” I see that request as an encouragement to train more people in Adinkra ethnohermeneutical theology. Interestingly, the woman’s request reveals how dependent members of the Church in Ghana largely are on pastor/theologians to do theologies for them. I was surprised that she did not say that as an educationist, she was going to get help from other members of the Church to analyze the theological implications of some of the Adinkra Symbols for teaching. It therefore, seems to me that one of the greatest services the Church can do to Christians in Ghana is to train members of the Church to be able to do their own theological analyses. If the art of doing theology for themselves from their own ethnosocial and cultural realities like the Adinkra Symbols become part of what it means to be a Christian in Ghana, Church members will begin to own their faith. That reality will resource them with finding godly answers themselves for dealing with issues that confront them in their settings—a sure way of arresting both split-level Christianity and folk religions.

For the purposes of doing theology that will include non-literate members of the Church, I suggest that Churches form ethnohermeneutic groups, which will be constitutive of both literate and non-literate theologians. Such a group of literate and non-literate theologians, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, is what I identified and used for the analyses of the Adinkra Symbols I used in focus group interviews. This is especially so because for contextualization to be complete, there needs to be an openness to affirm, modify, and if possible, reject aspects of the Adinkra Symbols as we seek to engage them in doing theology. It is my suggestion that an ethnohermeneutic community can engage all the realities involved in the process of Adinkra Symbol ethnotheology.

I suggest that it is not enough to train pastors to be doing theology for the members of the congregations. The Church has the responsibility of training every Church member to become an ethnohermeneutist and ethnotheologian, at least, for informing how they live Christianity in the face of life's challenges.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed ways by which we can do the Adinkra Symbol theology for the Akan people as a way of using their own cultural resources. I also provided a paradigm about how to use the Adinkra Symbols for teaching or doing ethnotheology in Akan people's Churches. I did that to give the proposals a bodily appearance to my propositions, I outlined three stories/sermons from the Adinkra Symbols for illustrating how to build theologies from three of the Adinkra Symbols for doing the theologies of the Sovereignty of God, and the Church as the Family of God

I also evaluated the rhetoric of the symbols in the light of scriptures and comments from my focus groups. As I mentioned, some of the focus group members doubled as ethnohermeneutic communities. They were intentionally constituted of literate informants and non-literate informants.⁵¹⁹ Through these ethnohermeneutic communities, I tested the Adinkra Symbols approach to ethnotheology. The responses from the ethnohermeneutic communities gave the assurance that the Adinkra symbolic theological approach, which nuances using the Adinkra Symbols, will be very effective.

⁵¹⁹ In chapter 1 I explained the concepts “literate and non-literate informants.”

General Conclusion



Figure 45

Sankofa Symbol

(Go back into history and retrieve the values for the good of contemporary life. Compare Jeremiah 6:16)

I have been drawing attention to the issue that Christian workers among Akans, whether foreigners or natives, can identify the metaphors of the Adinkra Symbols of the Akans as God's prior activity of grace unto salvation among them. I have argued that it is when Christian workers acknowledge and begin to critically dialogue with the Adinkra Symbols that they will begin to discover one of the ways for doing contextual theologies that will be appropriate for the context of the Akan people.

I have revealed in this dissertation that there is an extensive evaluation of the Adinkra Symbols as religious symbols, which an ethnographic research among the Akans themselves reveal.

A noteworthy proposal, which I mentioned in this dissertation is that for the Adinkra theological trajectory, we need ethnohermeneutics and not so much of the two-sided (diachronic-synchronic) historical-critical method of hermeneutics. I mentioned that Akans like most African traditional people appreciate reality via symbols. Therefore, for them, the stories of the Bible are largely appreciated as symbols that carry messages of God. I have also made the claim that we need to be able to do ethnohermeneutics with

the Adinkra Symbols by knowing the stories, or myths behind their creations. I made the claim for the need to know the stories or myths behind the Adinkra Symbols because the Symbols are largely, representations of the historical religious experiences of the Ancestors of the Akan people. The Adinkra Symbols were created as memory anchors in a lot of the instances, so that, in the oral literature setting of the Akan people, the Adinkra Symbols were intended to carry the faith of the Ancestors to unborn generations.

I have evaluated some of the literature on the origins of the Adinkra Symbols with data from my ethnographic interviews. The combination of the research data and the literature sources have facilitated the formation of a relatively deeper and more informed proposition of the origins of the Adinkra Symbols. Consequently, I have made the claim that the Adinkra Symbols have a historical origin, and that the origin is not in circumstances, as Danquah and Nkansah-Obrempong submit, but that the origins of the Adinkra Symbols are in the inspired creative work of a person—Nana Kwadwo Adinkra Agyeman, a patriarch king of the Gyamans. However, I have also argued that Nana Kwadwo Adinkra Agyeman could not have been the only one who created all the Adinkra Symbols.

I have argued that the search for the origins of the Adinkra Symbols was important for at least, three reasons. First, it has helped with identifying the creator(s) of the Adinkra Symbols, and also provided us with information on why and how Nana Adinkra created the Symbols. The discovery of the original rhetoric that the creators of the symbols assigned to specific Adinkra Symbols is what has contributed to seeing the Symbols as I have submitted they are—religious memory anchors. Therefore, I claim

that the Adinkra Symbols are for the transmission of the Akan people's traditional faith or creed to unborn generations.

I have also explained that there has been more than one Asante-Gyaman war as most of the scholars assume. I have submitted that there has been at least, six Asante-Gyaman wars in the history of the two kingdoms. Significantly, I have claimed that the reasons for the Asante-Gyaman wars were multifaceted. The reasons ranged from Nana Osei Tutu I's need for revenge on the Gyaman people, Suma people, and the Dormaa people for killing his uncle, Nana Obiri Yeboah; to the later need to take control of the profitable trade routes, that passed through the geographical areas where the two kingdoms settled.

I discussed the Adinkra Symbols as symbolic rhetoric from the experiences of the creators of those Symbols by extending the ideas of Yankah's Textile Rhetoric and Barber's Symbol as texts. My submission is that, as texts or rhetoric, the Adinkra Symbols serve as communication facilities within the religious, economic, and social spaces of the Akan people. Again, as symbolic texts, the Adinkra Symbols help to identify the largely religious undergirdings of Akan socio-cultural realities.

One of the key concepts that I have unpacked in this work is the "Adinkra hermeneutics," which I have developed as an upshot from Larry Caldwell's proposed ethnohermeneutics. I have explained that Adinkra hermeneutics is a way of doing Adinkra contextual theology for the Akan people that use their own cultural resources.

Another important issue which this work discovered is about what the Adinkra Symbols meant for Akans in the early years of the Akan kingdoms. I have shown how in contemporary times, Ghanaians have entextualized the Adinkra Symbols, as well as how

they have applied the Adinkra Symbols to their new social and political contexts in pursuit of peace and therefore, national development. Therefore, I have claimed like Kwame Gyekye that modernity does not necessarily mean a rejection of the traditions a people have inherited from their Ancestors. I proposed a theory that shows that a people always build on some of the values and traditions of their forebears in their search for new ways for dealing with the contemporary challenges they face.

In this work, I have illustrated the route to doing the Adinkra symbolic theology for the Akan people. I have, therefore, provided a paradigm for using the Adinkra Symbols for teaching or doing theology in the Church setting. The possibility of a way of doing theology with the Adinkra Symbols for the Akan people was a big hunch for this research and writing. I have therefore come to the realization that the Adinkra Symbols were symbols of God's prevenient grace among the Akans, which missionaries can use ethnohermeneutically, for doing ethnotheology with the Akan people.

I am now convinced and submit that the Adinkra Symbols are creedal symbols of the Ancestors of the Akan people, and as such, they provide a route to knowing about the Akan people's belief in the Supreme being—God. It is extremely interesting to discover that a lot of the symbols carry symbolic messages that seem equal to what the symbolic stories of the Bible carry. I have consequently argued that the Adinkra Symbols reveal the religiosity of the Akan people.

I am claiming that the best way to deeply grounding the knowledge and understanding of God among a people is to make those issues take roots from the time-tested traditions of the people's Ancestors. This does not, however, mean that the people will not be part of the global theological actors. It will only mean that those people will

contribute to ensuring that there is a mosaic of theological expressions around the globe. After all, at the end of our salvation one of the issues that will characterize God's people, as foreshadowed in Revelation 9:7, is a mosaic of God's people. As the Apostle John declared:

After this, I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.”⁵²⁰

There is, therefore, the need for the African to begin to stand on African hills and prophetically, call Africans to critically examine how African Christians can critically show the way to understanding God and His ways for their Christian development and Church relevance. The African Church is, therefore, faced with the responsibility of critically examining African inherited godly traditions from our Ancestors—great great grandmothers and grandfathers. I contend that Africans need to search for ways through which the African Church and theologians can be seen as seriously grappling with Ndiokwere's important observation:

Africans [need] to deepen their Christian faith so as to inculturate it in the African traditions. This is the biggest challenge to Christianity in the continent. Faith which does not become culture is likely to remain not fully accepted and lived. I think that an African is not fully Christian until he is able to think and express in African ways his experience of Christ ... the inevitable conclusion is that solutions to these problems will only be

⁵²⁰ Revelation 7:9-10

found when the rich resources of African initiative, creativity, and spirituality are brought to bear on these problems in a way which has not hitherto been attempted.⁵²¹

I have agreed with Ndiokwere's proposition in this work. I accepted the challenge, as it can be seen in this work, and have provided the Adinkra ethnotheology through an Adinkra ethnohermeneutical paradigm. These proposals are only intended to start the discussions. I have, at least, provided an illustration of what can be done if African theologians accept the challenge of helping the African Churches think, understand, and express the Christian faith in terms of the traditional experience of God in our African settings. If theology is faith seeking understanding, then we have to recognize that efficient understanding can best be realized within a people's epistemological orientations. The Adinkra symbolizations are one of such epistemological orientations.

There are multiples of African cognitive orientations in the different settings of Africa. These call for ethnotheological responses as a godly responsibility to the Church. My work has only pointed in that direction. I hope that African and Asian theologians will see this pointer and take up the challenge. As mentioned earlier in this work, the Lord is coming back for a Church that is a mosaic of cultures, ethnicities, and languages. It is not wrong for the Church to begin to reflect that cultural mosaic character before the Lord comes for His Church.

⁵²¹ Nathaniel I. Ndiokwere, *The African Church, Today and Tomorrow* (Nigeria: Snaap Press Ltd, 1994), 5-6.

I have discovered in this research that a proper theological construction has to be an offspring of the marriage between the anthropological and the countercultural models of contextualization.

Further Possible Research Work

I pointed to the need for research into why some of the Adinkra Symbols have images that look like the Christian cross in them. Again, I came across pointers to the subject that Akans could have been a stock of the ancient Israelites who might have migrated further south to their current locations in search of arable lands for farming. The limitedness of this work did not permit me to explore those necessary areas for deeper theological reflections. I hope someone will see the need for a research in those areas—who knows? I may have to engage those investigations myself in the future.

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Appendix
Appendix 1



Appendix 2



HM Nana Kwasi Adinkra Agyeman (whose name has been francized into: Nana Kouassi Adingra Adoumani), the current Gyaman king in the Ivory Coast.

Appendix 3



A Traditional Akan Temple at Abirem. The Priestess (“Onyame Komfo” literally, the Priest of God) is sitting on the stairs in front of the Temple. The structure has the Dweninimmen Symbol at the base of the two supporting pillars. This is an example of the use of the Adinkra Symbols in traditional sacred spaces.

Some Traditional Symbols of the Gas of Ghana

Appendix 4



Alakaa Nyunmo
(You can't deceive God)

Asrafoi (Followers)

Appendix 5



The main entrances of the office of the Ghana's telecom giant, Vodafone in Kumasi and Cantonments, Accra for instance has Adinkra Symbols displayed. It is significant to note that there are about five “Nyame biribi wo soro” Symbols alone displayed on the main doors and the glass walls at that those offices.

Appendix 6



Akoban facing each other (literally, war horn. The horn for calling subjects to war whenever it became necessary. It is a Symbol of vigilance and wariness)

Appendix 7



Pempamsie (Sew and put aside in readiness, Symbol of readiness and hardiness.

Appendix 8



Gye Nyame at the main entrance to the Center for National Culture, Kumasi. At the entrance, the Symbol can be a statement that says, it is only God who can run down the Center. It can also be a prayer that say, God, You are the only one in whom we trust so protect us.

Appendix 9

Symbols on display at the Center for National Culture,
Kumasi



Nyame dua (literally, God's Tree), a symbol of worship at
the Center for National Culture, Kumasi.

Appendix 10



Sunsum, symbol of human spirituality at the Center for National
Culture, Kumasi.

Appendix 11



Dwennimmen (literally, the ram's horns), symbol of strength at the Center for National Culture, Kumasi

Appendix 12

Symbols decorating the windows of St. Peter's Basilica, Kumasi





Appendix 13

Symbols decorating the floors and concrete seats at Manhyia Palace, Kumasi





Appendix 14

Symbols as Textile Rhetoric at Ntonso



Interestingly, at Ntonso in the Asante Region where Adinkra cloths are made, the photographs of President Obama have been embossed in a cloth, with the symbol adinkrahene (the chief of the Adinkra symbols) surrounding him. Also embossed in around him are Dwennimmen (symbol of strength) and “Obi nka obi” (symbol of the need for peaceful co-existence) this communicates Obama as the chief of all world leaders (i.e. President of the world), who is so mighty, and who is expected to maintain world peace.





Appendix 15

Symbols as Jewelry



A necklace (above) and wedding ring (below) of the symbols worn in Ghana



Appendix 16

An Example of an Adinkra Theological Teaching

Title of Teaching: The Sovereignty of God

Bible Reading: Romans 8:28–30

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. **What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us?**

Introduction

Today we are going to discuss the issue of fear. We will consider some of the reasons why as Christians we have to believe that our God is sovereign, and so, we do not have to be afraid of what human beings or spiritual forces of wickedness can do to harm us. I will lead the discussions from the Bible and the Adinkra Symbols renderings of what the biblical texts teach us about the assurance of the security we have in Christ.

Fear seems to be part of being human. In his letter to the Romans, as in the text we have just read, we see that Paul was dealing with fear in the Roman Christians. At the end of the preaching we would have realized that even our forefathers who were not as literate as we are now had ways of remembering and strengthening themselves in their faith that God is sovereign.

Gye Nyame



Figure 42

Do you know this symbol? This is the *Gye Nyame* Symbol. I explained its theological significance above, then I alluded to the text from Romans 8:28–30. After that, I linked it to the *Hye wo a anhye* Symbol.

Hye (wo a) anhye



Figure 43

Do you know this symbol? This is the Akan symbol expresses the faith that when we have faith and live in Christ, no person or situation can destroy us. In fact, *Hye wo a anhye* is the shortened form of *Nyame a wode woho abo no no nti, yehye wo a wonhye* (literally, “because of the God to whom you are related, you can never be burnt, or destroyed”). I explained it in terms of indestructibility, as I explained above in this chapter. I alluded to the following scriptural texts to encourage the congregation:

Proverbs 16:9

A man’s mind plans his way,
but the LORD directs his steps.

Isaiah 54:15–17

Behold, they shall surely gather together, but not by me: whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake. Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.

Proverbs 21:30–31

No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel,
can avail against the LORD.
The horse is made ready for the day of battle,
but the victory belongs to the LORD.

After the above two Symbols, I showed them the *Nyame nwu na M'awu* Symbol.

Nyame nwu na mawu

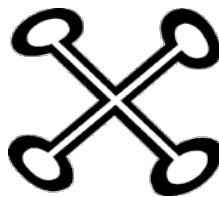


Figure 44

Again, do you know this symbol? Our ancestors created this symbol to represent the knowledge that God neither dies nor disappoints. Therefore, they left us with the belief that if we will be faithful to God and live for Him and serve Him in the ways He

wants us to serve Him, He will also to protect us, sustain our race, and ensure that our children and our people are never annihilated. He lives forever to ensure that. The following are His words in the Bible that encourage us to that effect:

Malachi 3:6–7b

“For I the LORD do not change; therefore, you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.

John 3:35–36

the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand. He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.

Revelation 2:9–11

‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death.’

Concluding Deductions

1. God is all-powerful, and nobody can go behind Him to destroy those whose faith is in Him.
2. Nothing can destroy those who are under the cover of God.
3. We need to continue to put our trust in this all-powerful God.

Concluding Prayers

1. Altar call for new converts, and renewal of our Christian commitment to God; and Prayers for those who are suffering because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

